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OF GUITAR
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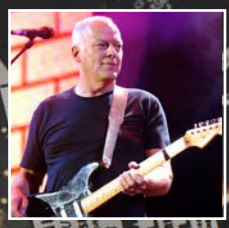
Guitar Classics

LEGENDS



CLASSIC INTERVIEWS WITH STAR PLAYERS

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS
GEAR AND PLAYING INSIGHTS FROM GUITAR'S BIGGEST NAMES

Featuring

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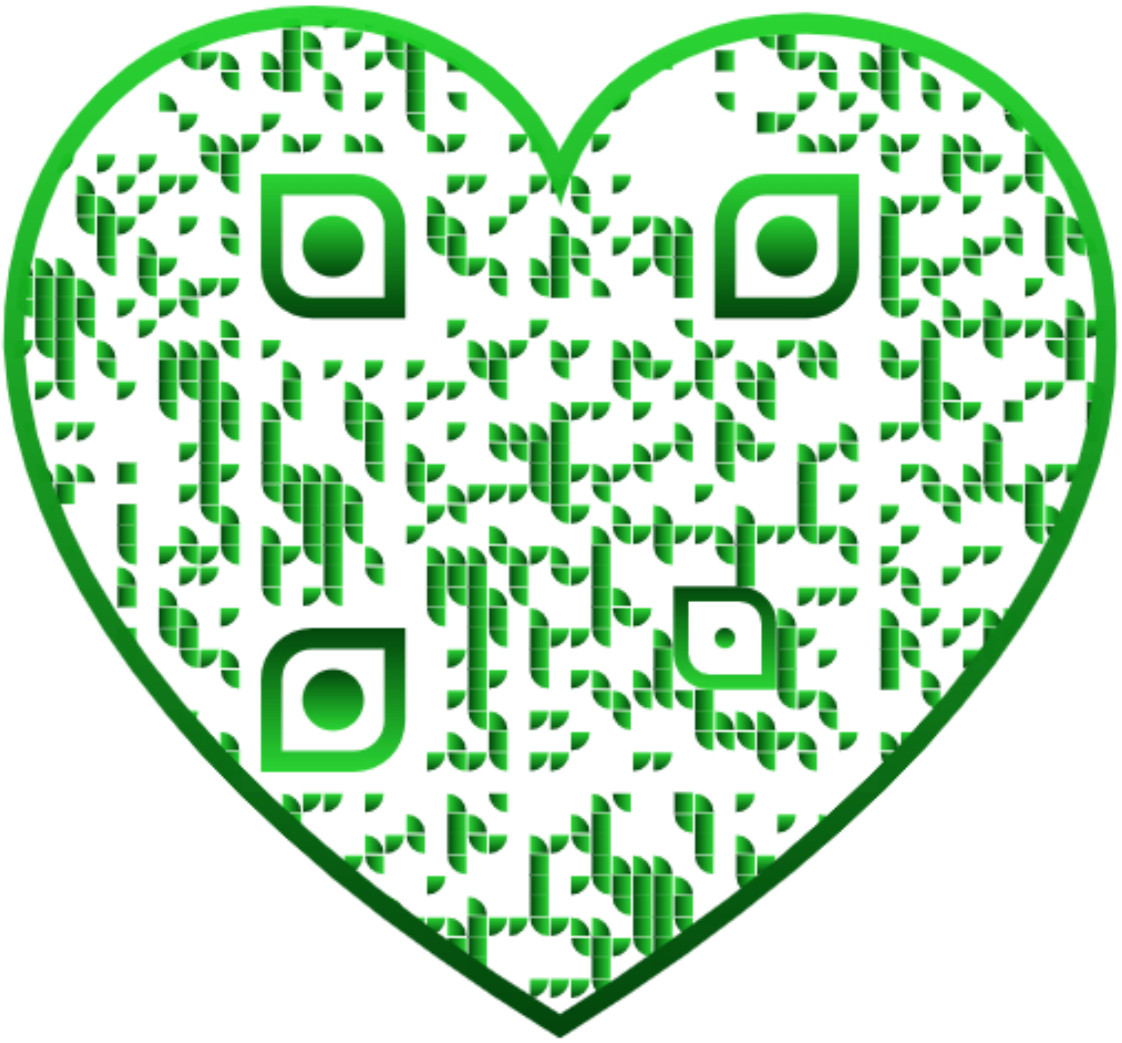

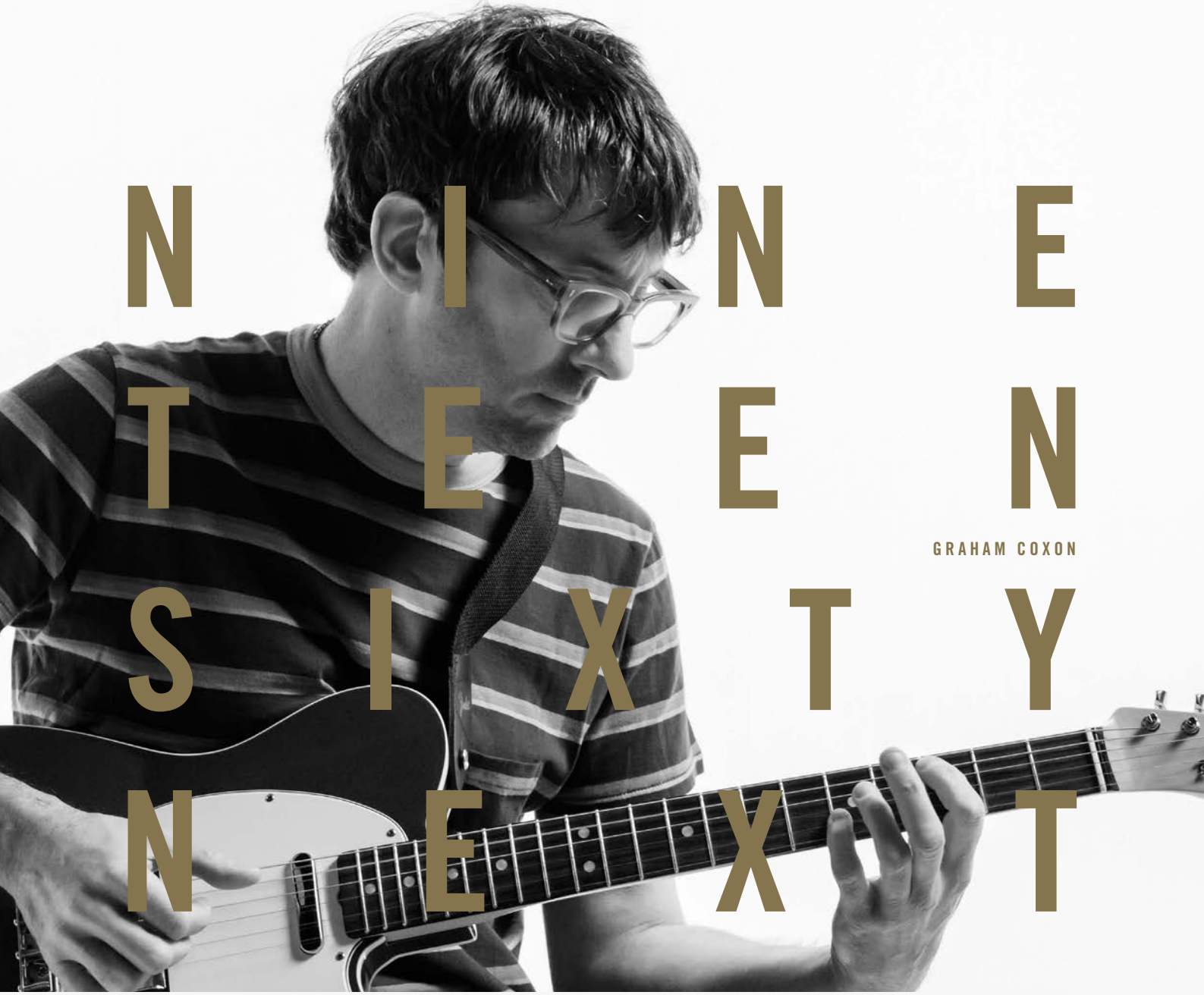

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WELCOME TO Guitar Classics LEGENDS

Welcome to *Guitar Classics: Legends*, where we've compiled a series of in-depth interviews from the archives of *The Guitar Magazine* – a treasure trove of wisdom from the biggest names in guitar playing that stretches back over 25 years.

It's not all about string gauges and drive-pedal settings, either (although a lot of it is). Looking down our stellar running list, would you, for example, be able to guess which guitarist finds it quite easy to "play a song and be thinking about washing the car"? Or which one believes that "it's all been done before, and if you can't accept that, you might as well fuck off and play *Sonic The Hedgehog*"? And who believes modding guitars "is like meeting someone and immediately buying them a nosejob, because you don't like their nose, instead of accepting them the way they are"?

The answers all lie in these pages, where you'll gain insight into the minds of players who've written songs that are familiar to millions and played riffs and basslines that even the postman can whistle – alongside players who have played on so many sessions, you probably own their records without realising it.

Sadly, some of these artists are no longer with us. But whether they're blues legends, household names or younger players reinvigorating the guitar as a musical force, they all have one thing in common – they all love the 1959 Les Paul Standard. And they're all united in their mastery of and love for their instrument, and all have harnessed the power it's always had to move people, often in very different ways. We hope you enjoy sifting through their collective wisdom, and that you find your own inspiration in their answers... Enjoy the issue.

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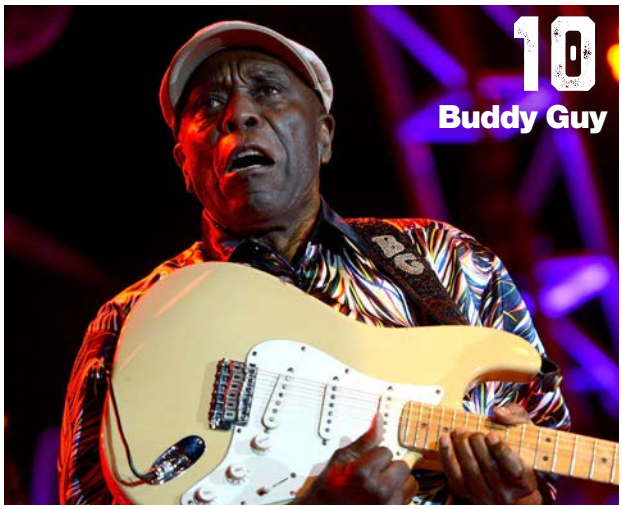

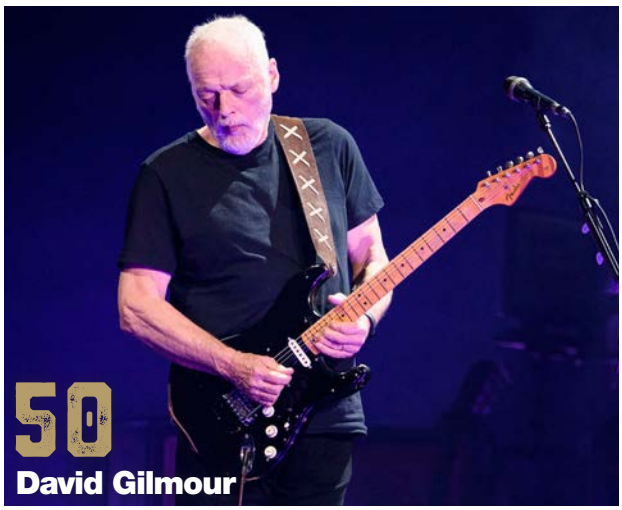

Guitar Classics

LEGENDS

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VampPower

DAN AUERBACH

When The Black Keys burst onto the scene in 2001, powered by the searing bluesy licks of Dan Auerbach. *Attack & Release* was the tipping point – and from there, the sky was the limit. We spoke to Dan Auerbach shortly after the album's release in 2008, and talked Tiescos, tiny amps, blues heroes and more...

Words STEVE BAILEY

Ohio duo The Black Keys have built their reputation with minimalist, retro, blues-inspired rock that packs a raw, authentic punch. They've done this with just guitar, drums and poignant, world-weary vocals, mostly laid down in their basement studio with rudimentary recording equipment. Despite – or perhaps because of – such limitations, guitarist Dan Auerbach and drummer Patrick Carney have somehow captured the spirit of the original blues pioneers and brought it kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

Their fifth LP marks a departure: for the first time, the band have emerged from the basement and invited a big-name producer on board. Brian 'Danger Mouse' Burton was putting a record together with original blues bad-ass Ike Turner and could think of no one more qualified to write songs for the great man than Messers Auerbach and Carney. Turner sadly passed before the opus could be completed, but a kinship was formed – and The Black Keys' own *Attack & Release* long player is the result, complete with two tracks originally offered to Ike.

The Black Keys grew up in the small industrial town of Akron, Ohio, home of tyre manufacturers Goodyear and known in the US as the 'Rubber Capital Of The World'. Blues wasn't particularly big in Akron, but even so, frontman Dan rejected the mainstream rock that proliferated among his peers and went for a more authentic source.

"I never tried to play rock songs," he insists. "I never listened to Led Zeppelin or any of that stuff. I was into bluegrass and blues – but I didn't like 12-bar blues, and I still don't." Instead, Auerbach sought out early Memphis blues, which was electric, raw, and stripped down, mostly played with droning open tunings. "People like Doctor Ross and Joe Hill Lewis... really minimal and distorted. And then there was Auburn 'Pat' Hare, who played guitar for Junior Parker and Howlin' Wolf – he had the most distorted guitar sound ever."

When Dan first began playing, he tried to emulate his heroes by turning up his amp to the verge of exploding. "That's what those early blues sounds were. It's the same way that punk rock was played, the same way that current music is played... it just sounds different when different people do it."

PAWN-SHOP CLASSIC

This preoccupation with obscure bluesmen led to some unscrupulous individuals taking advantage of the young Auerbach's tastes. I really liked Hound Dog Taylor, who played cheap Japanese guitars from the 60s. I had a white Stratocaster my mom got for me," he chuckles, "so I went to a guitar shop and

Auerbach plays his black National at the Quebec Festival D'Été in 2013

traded it for a Green Burst Teisco Del Ray with four pickups. The guy at the shop told me it was good deal! But you know, I still record with that guitar, so it was a good deal for me."

Despite his childhood obsessions, Auerbach doesn't really consider The Black Keys to have a blues sound. "I think the kind of tone that you get on the guitar should be universal, not pigeonholed into any one style. I think that a good tube amp with that kind of natural break-up can work on anything – rock 'n' roll, jazz, whatever.

"Steve Cropper was the master. I like all that Booker T. & The MG's stuff. He was playing through a Fender Harvard and, I tell you, those amps had a solid sound. They worked for anything."

When it comes to recording, Dan always favours a petite amplifier. "Small amps, I just love 'em," he grins. "Especially the ones with not too much circuitry. I think a lot of people don't realise that some of the best recordings, the ones that sound monstrously huge, were made with little amplifiers. I think recording is all about fooling the ear. It's a real artform."

His current secret weapon is an ancient Flot-A-Tone from the 1950s, which pushes about 20 watts through a single 10-inch speaker. "It's got a big cabinet, which gives it lots of low end. It just sounds amazing – I got it in Cleveland, Ohio, and it's been my favourite for recording for the last few years."

"SOME OF THE BEST RECORDINGS, THE ONES THAT SOUND HUGE, WERE MADE WITH LITTLE AMPLIFIERS"

When it comes to guitars, Dan is a little less dogmatic. "I'm really not too picky, especially when recording. I do generally prefer the funkier guitars, though," he admits. The guitar on *Attack & Release* is mostly a Harmony Stratotone, but the budget solidbody doesn't hold up on the road, so Auerbach is currently employing a Gibson Firebird. Similarly, he's been forced to semi-retire his beloved and much-repaired mid-70s Ibanez SG copy – not a strong guitar in the first place, and rendered even more fragile by a past owner removing rather too much wood to make way for a neck pickup.

"I just love that guitar. It feels amazing," he says. "The Japanese 'lawsuit' models play better than the new Gibsons – honestly!"

MOUSE IN THE HOUSE

Producer Danger Mouse was a positive influence on *Attack & Release*, encouraging the band to try out some new sounds. "I played a 1964 Fender VI baritone borrowed from a friend. It's in mint condition. It's all over the record... such an amazing sound. They used them a lot on those old Spaghetti Western soundtracks." The same friend also lent Dan a Rickenbacker 12-string which was jangled by both Dan and Patrick – the first time the latter has played guitar on a Black Keys record.

Other firsts included a spot of banjo on *Psychotic Girl*. "I've always had one around," says Dan. "I really love banjos, but I've never really wanted to play that typical style. I just basically play it like an open-tuned guitar with a couple of strings missing." For banjo and for all his slide work, Auerbach generally goes for his favourite open G or open D.

Extra innovations included the first-ever Black Keys guest slot, with Tom Waits guitar player Marc Ribot invited to sit in and play the solo on *Oceans And Streams*. On top of that Dan played a Hammond, a piano and even a synth. "I don't really know how to play

keyboards, but I always quite like to hear untrained musicians. It brings a different point of view, a more natural path from the brain to the hand."

Auerbach has an impressive hoard of effects. "It's an addiction. I've got a wall of shelves filled with pedals. God help me!" Fortunately, Dan now owns a studio in his home town – dubbed Akron Analogue – so his collection is all in a good cause. "I've stocked it with lots of instruments and a ton of pedals!" Some of Dan's pedals, including the delay he uses live, come from local effects builder EarthQuaker Devices. Their tremolo is "a kind of copy" of the Vox Repeat Percussion, as heard on the vocals of *Crimson Clover*, a trippy, effects-heavy US No. 1 in 1969 by Tony James And The Shondells. "It's really killer – choppy in a very square way. We ran the Fender VI through it on *All You Ever Wanted*." Another obscure pedal Auerbach favours is the Analog Man Sun Face. "It sounds better than any Fuzz Face copy I've ever heard. He uses really old germanium transistors."

Does Auerbach find the two-piece format to be cruelly revealing of any guitar mistakes? "No. I think it's easier to hide mistakes in a duo, because if I mess up, I'm not really out of sync or out of tune with anyone," he muses. "If you mess up in a four-piece, it's more difficult to find your way back. I think our songs, especially live, can become more elastic."

So... never tempted to add a bass player, then? "We tried a couple of people out, and it felt like a hindrance. Honestly, it just felt like it was bogging us down. So we gave up on that real fast. It's the same with other guitarists. When you have a rhythm guitar and a lead guitar, you're conforming to a certain style.

"Whatever we did, we didn't want to fall into the standard way of thinking. We always wanted it to be different."

ANALOGUE ATTACK: THE BLACK KEYS ON RECORDING

The band found the ideal place to mark their first LP recorded beyond Akron – a studio steeped in history, packed with vintage kit and not too far away. "It's called Suma and it's just outside of Cleveland, Ohio, hidden in the woods," Dan reveals. "It's one of the most amazing studios in the world. Grand Funk Railroad did their first few albums there and Pere Ubu recorded all their records there. I've recorded at Abbey Road, the old BBC studios, but this is right up there."

Suma was set up in the late 60s by audio pioneer Ken Hamann, who had been on the cutting edge of recording technology throughout the 50s and 60s, running the famed Cleveland Recording Studios, which produced many local and national hits. One of the historic first-ever Studer eight-track machines is still resident there, and Dan and Pat made use of the old Neumann lathe to cut some vinyl. "It's honestly an astonishing place," marvels Dan. "Paul Hammond, the engineer, is very old school – he started working in the studio in the early 70s. He uses old techniques, old microphones and a handmade console from 1969. But he's also a master of Pro Tools. They've always been at the forefront of technology, but they've stuck with the old gear, too."

So it came to pass that The Black Keys ended up using a vintage Ampex tape machine as well as Pro Tools – a far cry from the first two LPs they made in their basement. "Our first record was actually recorded on a digital Akai multi-tracker machine. The second record was done on a Tascam 388 – which is a quarter-inch eight-track," laughs Auerbach. "That's basically cassette-tape quality."

Auerbach at the 2009 Voodoo Experience festival in New Orleans, playing his Harmony H78

BUDDY GUY

BUDDY GUY IS A LIVING LEGEND OF BLUES GUITAR, BUT DESPITE HIS MYRIAD PLAUDITS AND AWARDS OVER THE YEARS, HE REMAINS A GUITARIST'S GUITARIST WHO ONLY REALLY CARES ABOUT PRESERVING AND FURTHERING THE MUSIC HE LOVES. WE SPOKE TO BUDDY IN THE WELCOMING ENVIRONS OF HIS CHICAGO BLUES CLUB, LEGENDS, IN 2006…

Words JULIAN PIPER

They don't call Chicago the Windy City for nothing. In January, the Arctic-like gale howls in over the lake with a vengeance, plunging the city into impossibly cold sub-zero temperatures. In summer, the wind is still there, but as much as the breeze cools the lakeshore tower blocks, by the time it reaches places like the funky old Chess Records building down on South Michigan avenue, it's just a rough blast of dust.

Chicago's certainly always been a tough place to survive, and this is never more true than for a bluesman. The dozens of small, smoky, sweat-drenched clubs – places like Theresa's, Florence's and the 1815 – that once offered a regular gig to musicians like Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, Elmore James and the hundreds that came after them are long gone. Of course, the blues is still there, but most visitors who still visit the city as musical pilgrims will probably find it in sanitised uptown joints like Blue Chicago and, if they've got any sense, Buddy Guy's Legends.

Legends is situated a short cab ride from downtown Chicago, and from the outside, there's little to distinguish it from many other clubs. Step inside, however, and there's a palpable sense of history. The walls are covered with memorabilia, alongside photos of the owner and the legendary names that regularly performed there – Stevie Ray Vaughan was on his way to the club for a late-night jam the night he died – and it's really like nowhere else. Once inside, you just can't wait for showtime.

But then Buddy Guy's no newcomer to the club business. Before starting Legends, he owned the Checkerboard Lounge, one of the legendary Chicago hangouts and a place that will always have a place in rock history. In 1981, The Rolling Stones unexpectedly jammed there with Muddy Waters, and some think the bootleg DVD of the occasion shows that, while Keef and Ron Wood might have picked up a good deal about the blues, they're still not quite Muddy Waters.

FEELING AT HOME

Every January, Buddy takes time off touring to host shows at the club. It's a long-standing tradition and, as he explains, one he absolutely loves.

"I finished the night before last, and as long as the people enjoy it I'll go on doing it," he affirms. "Music for me is all about making someone happy, and I always enjoy that. I love to see someone smiling, and

Buddy Guy, keeper of the blue flame, at The Canyon Club in Agoura Hills, California in 2017

hope that I made them forget about other things for a while."

There's been a long tradition of blues players owning clubs: even BB King now has a chain throughout the States. It's good business, with one big advantage: if you own a place, you've always got a gig.

"I think I was the first guy to have a club," Buddy reflects. "Back in 1972, there were blues clubs all over Chicago, but after the riots, they disappeared. Drugs took over and people weren't drinking and listening to the music any more. All over town, there were clubs closing and I was thinking: 'Where's the next Eric Clapton, BB King or Muddy Waters going to be heard?'. I just got my life savings and decided that I was going to open my own. I wasn't looking for a big profit and even today, I don't make a lot of money from Legends, but I have a lot of fun watching other people play."

And it's true – when he's not spreading his own particular brand of the blues gospel around the world, there's nothing more Buddy enjoys than just hanging out at the club checking out the action, and visitors are often surprised to find the boss perched on a bar stool holding court and listening to the band.

"I'm not one of those performers that the only time you see them is when they're onstage – I like to hang out with the people," Buddy assures us. "I wouldn't ever want to be so famous I can't be seen at the grocery store or gas station. If someone recognises me, I don't mind – I'm not going to turn my back.

"Sure, sometimes I get fed up with it, but it's no different from any other working day. You just say to yourself, hey, I'm tired, so I'm going to go home, take a shower and come back tomorrow. But I don't let the fans ever know that – I just use an excuse! I say that I've got to go to the bathroom or something, and take off. Next day, I'm ready for them again!"

> "BB'S THE FATHER OF EVERYTHING THAT ANYONE WHO FIRST PICKS UP A GUITAR LEARNS TO DO"

RIDING WITH THE KING

If we're to believe what we read, 2006 might well be the last time that we see BB King tour the UK. It's a sad prospect, and although the two bluesmen are from different generations, King's retirement would inevitably leave Buddy – himself now 69 – as the senior bluesman on the block. It's not a situation he regards with any enthusiasm.

"I read about it, but I don't believe it," Buddy says, shaking his head. "The way he loves to play, I don't think he's ever going to stop! I'm really not a young man any more, but BB can't hand that baton over to anybody. If he does, I'm going to have to ask him just what we're supposed to do if he hangs up?

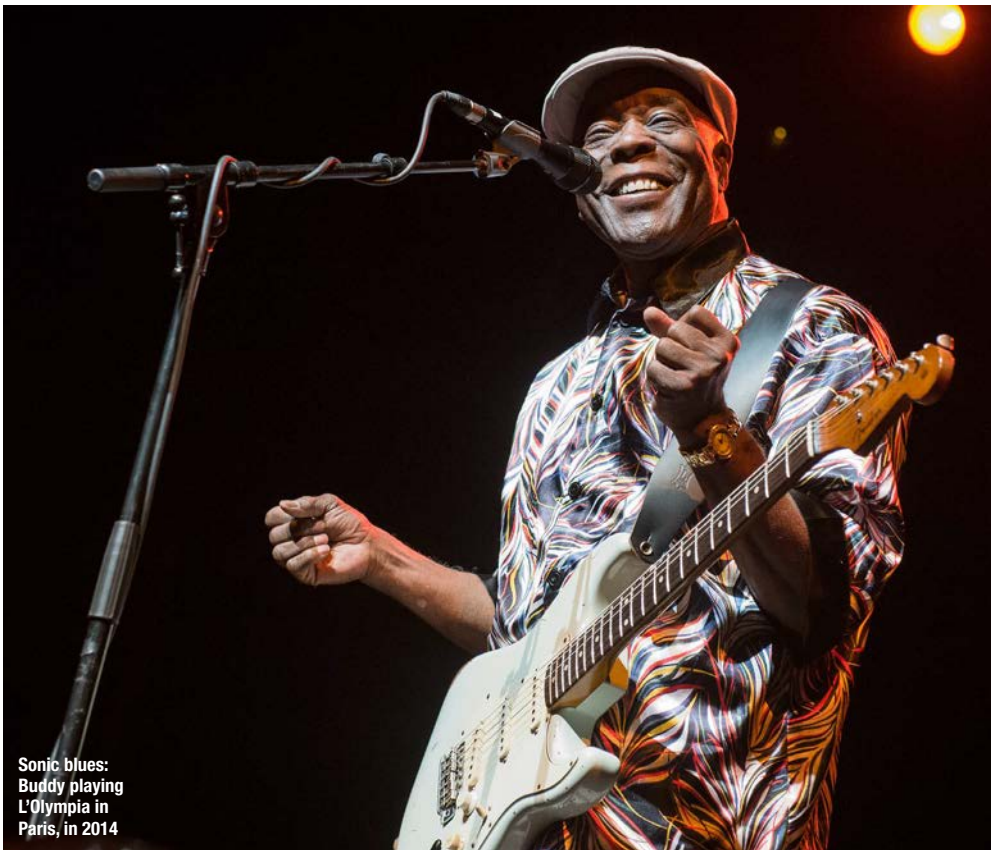
"Man, he's the father of bending strings and just about everything else that anyone who first picks up a guitar learns to do. They all have some BB King in their playing. There's no one that can ever fill his shoes, or Muddy Waters' shoes, or Howlin' Wolf's shoes; you have good and great people coming along, but when you were around those guys, your feet would be patting along just as they talked – and I'm not so good at it. When BB King started shaking his left hand, no guitar player had ever done that before. Now it's something that we all do without thinking about it."

Over the years, Buddy's come in for more than his fair share of criticism about the pacing of his shows. New fans and reviewers alike are often baffled by Buddy's enthusiasm

Buddy in London in 1965; a young Rod Stewart acted as Guy's unpaid driver on his trip to the capital

Buddy Guy in The Netherlands in 1991, the year of his acclaimed seventh solo album, *Damn Right, I've Got The Blues*, which featured Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton and Mark Knopfler

"YOU HOPE ONE DAY YOU'LL PICK UP YOUR GUITAR AND EVERYBODY WILL BE HAPPY!"



Sonic blues: Buddy playing L'Olympia in Paris, in 2014

for performing the music of his peers, such as John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters, rather than his own songs, but this quietly spoken man can at times be almost painfully modest about his own abilities: and when he performs songs like *Hoochie Coochie Man* or *Boom Boom*, it's something he genuinely does with total reverence. Nevertheless, the criticism is obviously something that troubles him deeply.

"I played the Chicago Blues Festival last year for the first time in over 10 years, and at the end of my show, the whole crowd were screaming for more and they just wouldn't let me leave the stage. Afterwards, one critic said that I was just a showman, but what can I do about that? I've been a showman all my life!

"When I read that stuff, I just have to tell myself that it's the opinion of just one person... but sometimes, it does feel as though I'm in a kind of no-win situation. If I play the acoustic guitar, I have some people saying 'Great!', and then somebody else will be unhappy, saying they didn't come here to hear me play the acoustic guitar. The public are so hard to please, but you just keep going, hoping that one day you'll pick up your guitar and everybody'll be happy!"

A DEEP WELL

It's an unenviable situation, and it's impossible not to sympathise with Buddy Guy's position. The reality is that he has an astonishing back catalogue of material, and in recent years the man has recorded everything from an acoustic album to the laid-back, greasy, Fat Possum-inspired trance sounds of *Sweet Tea*. Still, it comes as something of a surprise to find that someone who's just been inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, has been awarded countless Grammy awards and is acknowledged by the likes of Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck as the finest guitar player on the planet, suffers from stage fright.

"It's true!" Buddy admits. "I suffer with it a lot, and in fact, it's the only time that I drink, otherwise I'd think that I was an alcoholic! I drink a bit of Cognac and it calms me down – Muddy taught me that. Even when I'm playing at the club, I can hardly believe that all these people have come out in these temperatures; if they're prepared to do that for me, then I just think I've got to go out and give them everything I've got. Still, I'm always nervous and worried about what people might think about the show."

And if Buddy champions the cause of the blues with the kind of missionary zeal you would expect from a door-stepping evangelist, it's hardly surprising. When it comes to his own albums – and with some justification – he's often despaired of the lack of mainstream success he's achieved. True, his 'comeback' album *Damn Right I've Got The Blues* generated some well-deserved attention in the Guy corner, but that was back in 1991.

"Better late than never," Buddy wryly observes about his Hall Of Fame endorsement. "Blues is scary right now. You don't really hear it on the TV any more, you don't hear it on the radio. If you can't sell records to kids between seven and 15 years old, you're just not going to sell any records. I think sometimes that if my grandchildren don't know who I am, there's not much hope of anyone else knowing!"

BRINGING HIS A-GAME

Now his new album *Bring 'Em In* comes on as a potent combination of blues and soul, with

Guy playing the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival in 2015

Buddy digging deep into his Southern roots. Recorded in New York and Memphis with veteran producer Willie Mitchell, best known for his work with Al Green, helping out with the horn arrangements, it's his most fully-rounded album to date and also potentially his most commercial.

But, of course, Buddy Guy's guitar is never far from the action, and on tracks like *I've Got Dreams To Remember* and *Do Your Thing* he comes up with the kind of deliciously sensual soul grooves you'd hear on a jukebox in any bar from Jackson to Beale Street come 11:30 at night – and if his sanctified reworking of Bob Dylan's *Lay Lady Lay* with Robert Randolph on pedal-steel guitar doesn't make you want to testify in church on Sunday, nothing will.

"WHEN I FIRST CAME UP TO CHICAGO, YOU HAD TO PLAY WHATEVER WAS ON THE JUKEBOX"

RED-HOT POLKA: BUDDY AND HIS STRAT

The fact that Buddy Guy loves Fenders is something that's never been in doubt, but being the object of his affections has never been an easy option. Back in the 70s, when he and Junior Wells were touring Africa, his cherished '57 Sunburst Strat fell from the roof rack of his car, the case popped open and the guitar bounced down the street (to Buddy's relief, the driver didn't attempt to reverse).

Just a few years later his old Fender Bassman amp also had a close call when it was in the boot of a car written off by Otis Rush. Amazingly, after the amp was dug out from the wreck and plugged in, it proved none the worse for its adventure. Buddy's '57 Strat was eventually stolen, and despite his well-known penchant for his Fender signature models, it wasn't until recently that he has been able to fall in love with another Sunburst '57.

"I was playing down in Florida and after the show, a guy walked in and asks me to autograph this beautiful '57 he was holding," Buddy recalls in wonder. "It was exactly like my Strat that I'd had stolen back in 1978 – I couldn't believe it! I offered to buy the guitar, but he said: "Man – I'd let you have my wife before that guitar!'"

Anyway, I invited him to have a few shots of Dognac with me, and by the time we'd drunk about half the bottle, I offered to trade him my red polka-dot guitar I'd been using that night. To my surprise, he agreed, and about a month later, he wrote me a note calling me his 'guitar father', which I thought was nice.

"The first guy I saw use a Strat was Guitar Slim, when he came through Baton Rouge. At the time, I was playing guitar in a band led by this guy called Big Poppa; he said if I'd stay in his band, he'd buy me a Stratocaster – which he did. They weren't that expensive at the time – about $130. I fell in love with it and I've been in love with Strats ever since. I'm even back to using a couple of my original Fender Bassman amps that I've had reconditioned."

"I was very pleased with it," Buddy agrees. "But you can still be sure that it's not going to get any airplay. It's quite a soul-influenced album, because I thought that maybe I could sneak in there and get a little more airplay with that kind of stuff; a college campus station might play a slow blues about three o'clock in the morning, but you're not going to hear Buddy Guy otherwise!

"The problems go way back before the so-called British invasion of the States in the 60s," he sighs. "Before then, everyone from Wilson Pickett and James Brown to Muddy Waters were classed as R&B players. Then they started separating it all out, putting blues into a separate compartment for people like myself and Muddy, and James Brown and Wilson Pickett became soul singers.

"When I first came up to Chicago, you just had to play whatever was on the jukebox – Ray Charles, Fats Domino. It didn't matter what it was, and you'd slide the blues in there as well. You'd get a gig, because the club owners knew you could play what the people wanted to hear. They didn't separate anything, either: it was just R&B. I'm not a baby anymore, and I don't want to become an endangered species! I've been trying to do a commercial album since the 60s," Buddy grins. "I'm starving, man, to keep the blues alive!"

Buddy poses with his iconic Polka Dot Strat before playing at Shibuya On Air in Tokyo, Japan in 1993

JAMES BURTON

James Burton is one of the great original electric-guitar stylists and a legend of the session scene. We spoke to James in December 2009 to learn about his country roots, his session career and risking the wrath of Elvis Presley...

Words JULIAN PIPER

When, in 1952, Mr and Mrs Burton splashed out $280 – a hefty sum – on a shiny new Fender Telecaster for their son, they couldn't possibly have realised where it would lead... even in their wildest dreams. The 13-year-old James would pay back his parents' faith by making that very instrument the star of more hit records than perhaps any other guitar in history.

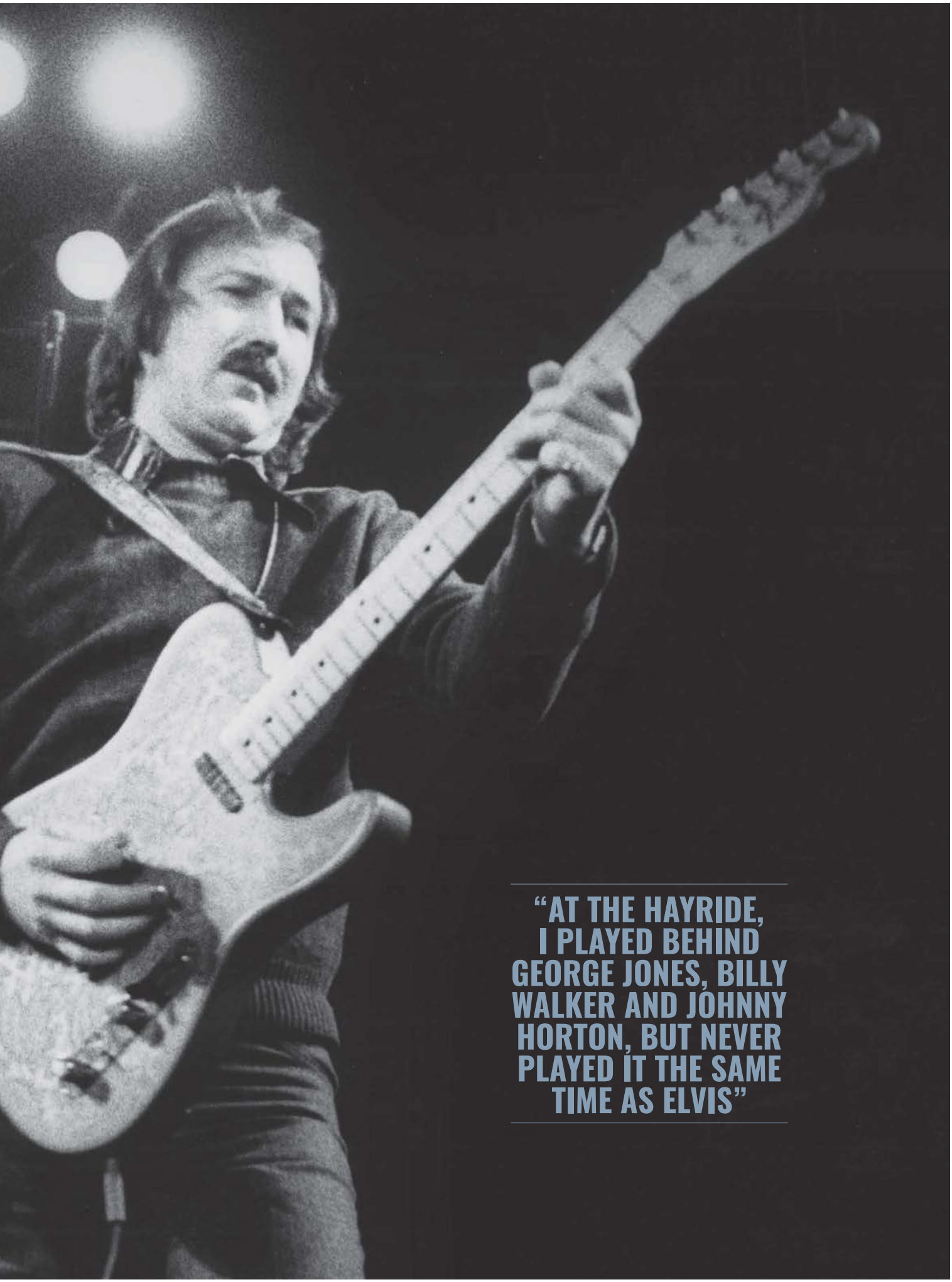
Many will have spotted the quiet man playing the eyecatching Pink Paisley Tele on stage with Elvis during his famous Las Vegas 70s residency, but few would have predicted the huge influence James Burton was to wield over the entire history of rock 'n' roll. Burton was the go-to guitarist for virtually every top Californian record label from the 60s onwards, playing integral licks and riffs on classics by The Beach Boys, The Monkees, The Everly Brothers and thousands of others.

Despite this, James Burton has never had a guitar lesson. Entirely self-taught, he turned pro at the tender age of 14, encouraged by talent-contest victories in his hometown of Shreveport, Louisiana. So impressive were his skills that not only did he play at parties – the usual outlet for underage prodigies at the time – but he was also granted a special permit from the local police station to play the local bars and clubs. The big gig in town was the Louisiana Hayride, broadcast live every Saturday night on KWKH radio. This was the show that launched the careers of other big names such as Hank Williams, and such was the buzz around Burton that he was asked to join the house band while he was still only 14.

"It was wonderful," remembers James. "It was held at the Municipal Auditorium in Shreveport... there's so much history in that building, it's incredible. I played behind George Jones, Billy Walker and Johnny Horton, but I never played it at the same time as Elvis. When Elvis played the Hayride I was always on tour with a country singer called Bob Luman." Luman, incidentally, named his backing band The Shadows. Hank Marvin was a huge Burton fan... even though he had never seen a picture of his hero with his Telecaster, and thus made the famous 'mistake' of ordering a Strat instead.

CHICKEN-PICKING GOOD

James got his first taste of session work at local label RAM Records in 1955, and when frontman Dale Hawkins came to town, the pair began playing together and soon cooked up a tune that played its own part in shaping rock 'n' roll. "When I first started playing, I wrote a little melody lick which became *Susie-Q*," explains Burton. "When I was in a blues band with Dale,



"AT THE HAYRIDE, I PLAYED BEHIND GEORGE JONES, BILLY WALKER AND JOHNNY HORTON, BUT NEVER PLAYED IT THE SAME TIME AS ELVIS"

wrote the music, and he wrote the lyrics." The song eventually got to No. 27 in the US charts and has since been recorded by acts such as The Rolling Stones, The Everly Brothers and Creedence Clearwater Revival.

After a year on the Hayride, Burton's distinctive style was fully formed. It took in many influences, including a love of the steel guitar developed from playing with Hayride steel man Sonny Trammell.

"My thing is country music, blues and rhythm and blues all mixed together. I kind of took a little bit of each one and made it one," muses James. "I just played a little different – in the sound, and the approach to the chord structures. It was God's given gift, he was my teacher, and I don't know where else I'd have gotten that kind of training. You create an identity, then it's easy to pick out on the records. It's like when you hear Dolly Parton sing – you know who it is."

Burton's style involves a fingerpick slotted onto his middle finger as well as a normal flatpick. "In the mid 50s, I developed a little style called chicken-picking – it's just my way of playing. The strings in those days were very stiff and I wanted to bend them, so I experimented with the banjo strings and it worked out perfectly. The banjo strings didn't have the little balls at the end which holds them in place, so I would have to cut the ball off a regular string and attach it to the banjo string to hold the tension.

"THE STRINGS IN THE 50S WERE VERY STIFF AND I WANTED TO BEND THEM, SO I EXPERIMENTED WITH THE BANJO STRINGS"

James with one of several Signature Fenders: this 90s one features three Lace Sensor pickups

"I used those for the first four strings and then I used the regular D for an A string and the regular A for the E. The sound was so different... I loved it, man! It became my sound. I guess I was probably one of the first to do that... or maybe the first, I don't know."

TELECASTER ON TELEVISION

By 1956, Bob Luman – with Burton on guitar – had chalked up a string of hits and was invited to appear in a Hollywood movie. While in California, they landed a slot on the NBC television network's *Town Hall Party* show, and things suddenly began to snowball for the 16-year-old Burton. *The Adventures Of Ozzie And Harriet* was an incredibly popular TV show which went on to become the longest-running sitcom in US history (pipped recently by *The Simpsons*).

Ozzie and Harriet were a real-life couple – shots of the outside of the house were of the pair's real home – and the show also starred their son, Ricky Nelson. Ricky was a singer, and when he heard Burton play, he knew he had to have him in his band. Burton agreed and left Shreveport for Los Angeles, spending two years at the Nelson household. Storylines were written to feature Ricky's band, so James was now a TV star and would be the guitar player on all of Ricky's many hits until 1966.

Burton was poached by Johnny Cash around 1965. This freed him up to become a top session man and a member of the legendary Wrecking Crew, a group of virtuoso musicians who played on so many hits, it's almost impossible to count them.

"I was doing five or six sessions a day, seven days a week. It was a very busy time," Burton recalls. "Each session was about three hours. Sometimes we'd play all night, and just take a nap if we had time.

"Brian Wilson – he'd want to record all day and all night, so he wouldn't want anybody to leave. We'd work the whole weekend. I did the same thing with The Monkees. We did tons of stuff. I can't remember all of them, but I know I did *I'm A Believer* and *Last Train To Clarksville* – I think me and Gerry McGee played on that." McGee, famed for his clean guitar tones, went on to join The Ventures.

Phil Spector was one of Burton's frequent employers; but almost every contractor in LA would call upon him for work from TV and movie soundtracks to supporting artists like Nat King Cole, Merle Haggard and Buck Owens. Burton particularly enjoyed playing for Glen Campbell and Merle Haggard, as he got to showcase his love of the dobro.

RAISING THE BAR

"I think that with the dobro as a slide instrument, you can do a lot more with it than just bluegrass or folk music," he says. "I've used it on a lot of pop records, I've used it on Nancy Sinatra records... all kinds of things. I usually use either an open G or an A tuning, though if I'm doing a lot of blues stuff, I'll go to a D tuning or an E. I like the A tuning, because it's a little higher pitched and a little brighter sounding, and it gets more bite out of the instrument."

For dobro, James sticks with his fingerpick and flatpick, but utilises a contoured Stevens slide with his left hand. "It has a cutout, so you can lay your finger right in the top of it. A lot of steel guitar players use a round bar, but the Stevens is a lot easier to manoeuvre.

"I did some slide stuff on the Everly Brothers' records; there's some with John Denver, and I used it on Glen Campbell's first album, *Big Bluegrass Special*. The thing about being a session man is you don't know until you get there whether you'll be playing acoustic, dobro, slide or banjo – even mandolin." When it comes to electric, James

James and Elvis at the Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, Long Island, in 1975

has always stuck with his favourite axe. "All you need is one guitar. I always used my '52 Telecaster, unless a producer specifically requested a certain instrument."

ROYAL APPOINTMENT

Burton even played his '52 for the first couple of gigs with Elvis in 1969. After declining the King's invitation to play on the *'68 Comeback Special* – he was busy playing with Frank Sinatra – James was offered the chance to put together the band for Presley's Vegas residency. This time, he was pleased to oblige, and stayed with the show until Elvis's death in 1977. "We were a powerhouse on stage," he says. "Elvis loved it. That was his thing."

James was given a new Telecaster for the shows, and despite a few initial misgivings, it has become his trademark. "A good friend of mine, Chuck Widener, who was vice president at Fender, called me and said: 'James, I've got a guitar here with your name on it'." Mysteriously, Widener wouldn't send the guitar – he insisted that Burton come and collect it. "I walked in and the case was in the corner of the office, so I opened it up. I said: "Oh no, no, no, that's not for me, man... way too flashy!"

James was nervous that Elvis might think he trying to upstage him with such an outrageous guitar, but was persuaded after a slap-up lunch to take it back to Vegas and give it a try. "I finally talked myself into playing it. We did the first show and Elvis didn't say anything, but between shows, this Memphis Mafia guy called Red West came down and said Elvis wanted to see me. I thought: 'Oh no, here we go...'

"I went to the dressing room, and Elvis said to me: "I notice you're playing a different guitar tonight," and I told him I had been a little nervous about bringing it out, with it being a bit flashy. He said: 'Oh, no, it looks great, it sounds great. Play it. I love it!' So that was a big relief."

James turned 70 in August [2009], and it's now a full 40 years since he joined up with Elvis for that legendary run in Vegas. There have been many memorable stints with the likes of Emmylou Harris, John Denver and another Elvis – Costello – in between, but these days, his biggest motivating force is The James Burton Foundation.

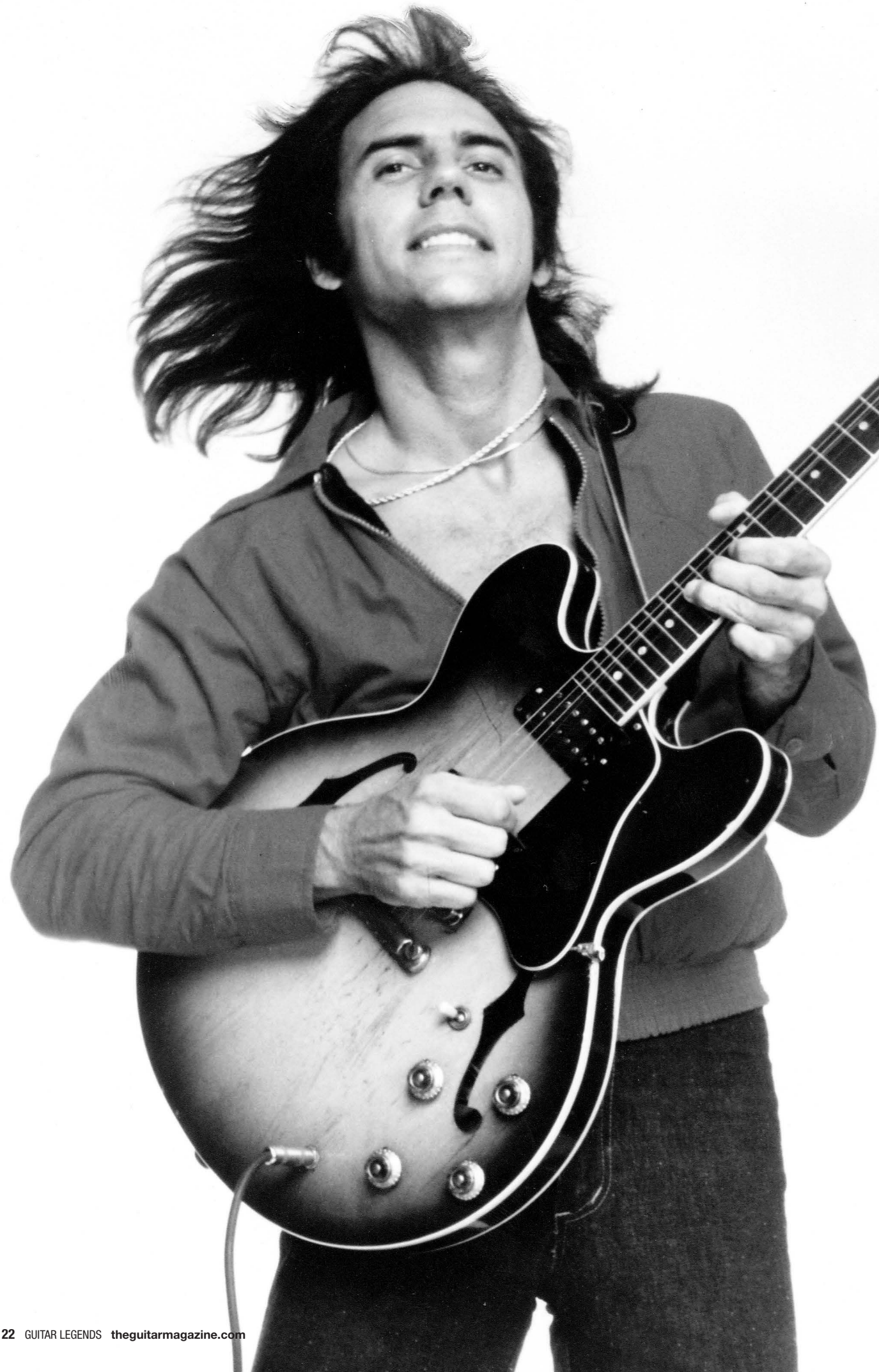
The organisation is all about raising money to put guitars in the hands of young kids, and so far, around 4,500 instruments have been distributed to schools and hospitals [the James Burton Foundation is still going strong: visit www.jamesburtonfoundation.org for more information].

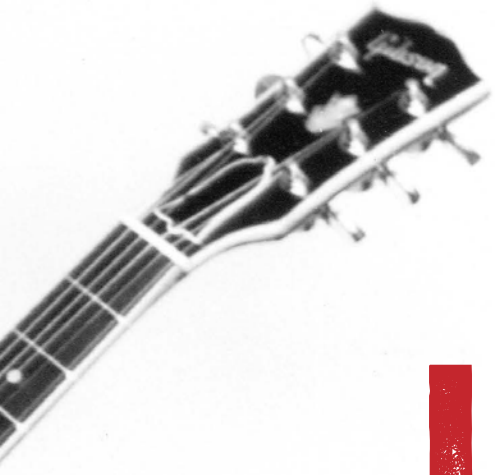
Since 2005, Burton has also been hosting the James Burton International Guitar Festival to bring in funds for the project, and the venue is the very same place where he began his career, as just a kid himself – the Shreveport Municipal Auditorium.

This year [2009], an attempt was made to break the world record for the most people playing the same song simultaneously on the guitar. the songs of choice were *Hound Dog* and *That's All Right, Mama*, to mark four decades since Elvis's Vegas comeback; sadly, they fell a little short on numbers, but a great time was had by all as Albert Lee, Al Di Meola, Kenny Wayne Shepherd and others rocked the hall to its foundations.

With another job well done, you might think James would take it easy, but that session-man work ethic still runs deep. There's a new solo gospel album in the pipeline, and he'll soon be touring with *Elvis – The Concert*, a live show that reunites the Vegas band behind a state-of-the-art video projection of Presley culled from his best filmed performances. All the music is live – except, of course, for Elvis's voice.

With well over half a century as a pro under his belt, James Burton can still adapt to even the most bizarre situation, in the studio or on the stage. Just hand him his Telecaster, and watch him go.





LARRY CARLTON

Whether it's been as a solo performer or sessioneer to the stars, Larry Carlton has lit up the jazz skyline for decades. "It's all become one statement now – my life and my music," he tells us, in this interview from August 2007...

Words JOE MATERA

When the topic of session playing arises among guitar players, one name that's sure to be brought up sooner or later is that of Larry Carlton. The former studio supremo, with his trademark Gibson ES-335, was the undoubted king of the LA session scene between 1970 and 1977, playing up to 500 dates each year; it's the kind of schedule that would have killed the creativity of any ordinary mortal, yet during that period, Carlton was also a fully paid-up member of jazz combo The Crusaders. The list of the people he's supplied guitar for reads like a *Who's Who* of the music industry: Joni Mitchell, Quincy Jones, Herb Alpert, John Lennon, Jerry Garcia, Steely Dan and about a zillion others.

Ever since Larry Carlton quit the session scene, he's forged ahead with a successful solo career – but looking back to those heady studio days, he feels a strong sense of pride and achievement.

"Session work taught me how to make records, and it was great exposure," he reflects. "It also helped shape my playing – particularly the sessions I did for Joni Mitchell. We contributed so much to her songs. Joni had never recorded with a rhythm section before until *Court And Spark*, and to be associated with those great songs and to have helped shape them for the world was great.

"I quit doing session dates in 1977. It wasn't exactly because I wanted a solo career... it was more that I was so busy for all those seven years that I couldn't charge any more money, and I couldn't take any more work. The session scene was already at the peak of what could be had, so I thought I could maybe get into producing records. So I started producing acts and playing live for fun – and somehow that turned into a solo career for me."

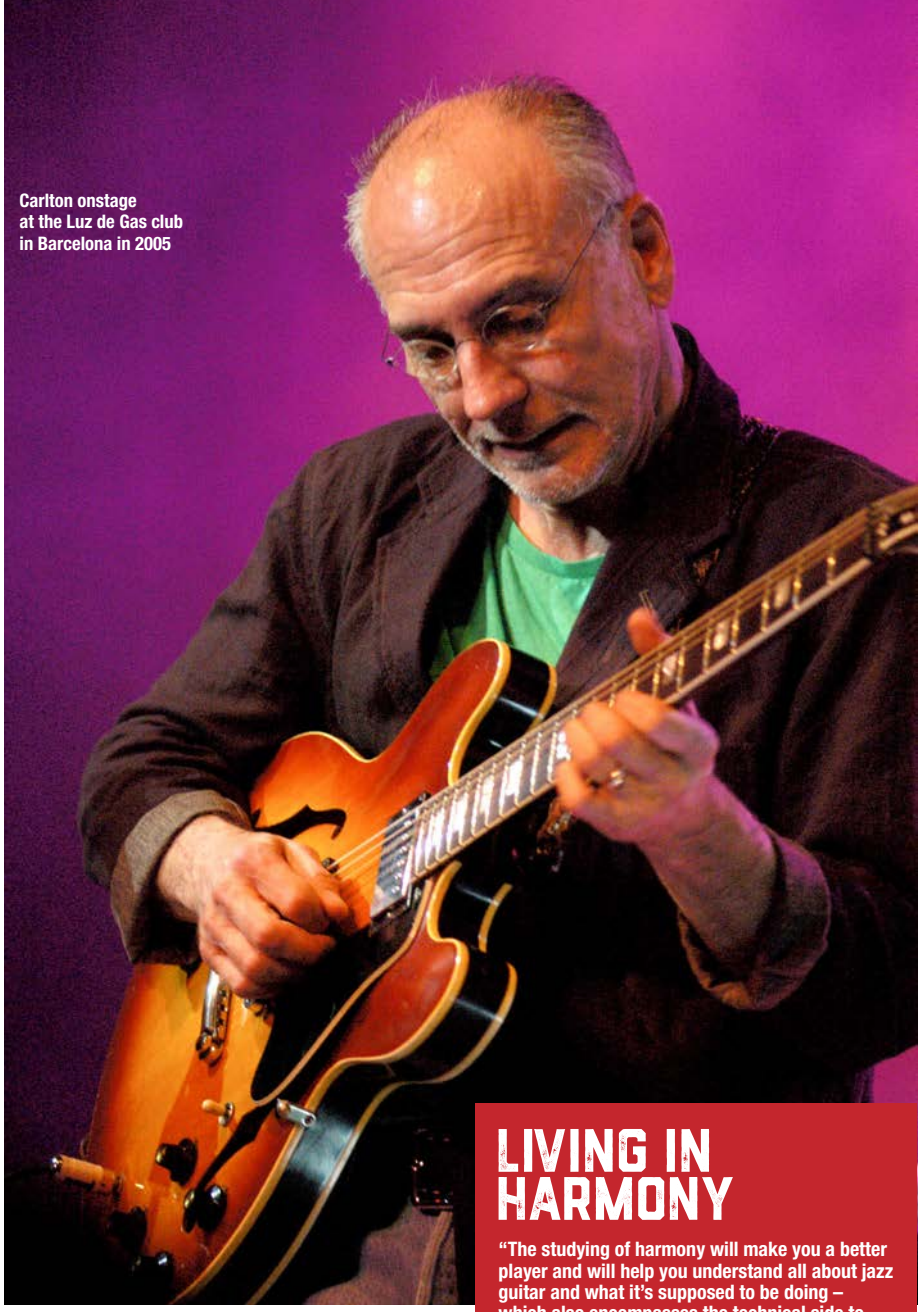
SOLO ADVENTURES

As Carlton ventured forth on a solo path, his approach to his instrument underwent a metamorphosis. This new approach peaked on his 1982 studio outing, *Sleepwalk*. "I was in a period of transition," he affirms. "*Sleepwalk* was the first album where I used a Stratocaster. It made me play differently and write different kinds of songs."

Carlton goes on to admit that his encyclopaedic knowledge of the fingerboard's terrain can hinder him when it comes to composing, so he turns to the keyboard for inspiration. "If I sit at the keyboard with some kind of sound, say a kind of string sound behind me, it will make me write a whole different kind of melody."

When the conversation inevitably turns to guitar solos, Carlton stresses the importance of ensuring that you have something worth adding to the mix, rather than just going through the fretboard motions – whether you find yourself in the confines of the studio or on the stage.

"I'll always try to develop the solo theme into some kind of musical statement that will stand on its own," he says of his own approach. "I've matured past the point of playing just licks. I want to make music, not licks. In the early days, when I wasn't as mature, I had to think more. But now I don't think – I just play. It's all become one statement now with my life and my music, so that when I'm up there on stage, it's a very honest, spontaneous approach to guitar playing."



Carlton onstage at the Luz de Gas club in Barcelona in 2005

FAITHFUL SIDEKICK

One constant by Carlton's side throughout his long and illustrious career has been his trusty Gibson ES-335. "I've been playing the same guitar since I first bought it back in 1969," he says. "I now have two. The one that I've played all these years is a '68, while the other one was actually given to me as a gift from a fan about three years ago. A gentleman in the northern part of the United States sent me an email and told me about a guitar he had that was exactly like mine. Because it hadn't been played in 15 years and had belonged to his grandmother, he wanted to offer to give it to me. He basically said I would be the guy who he would want to have this guitar. So he sent it to me, and it's a wonderful instrument. I only take my one main guitar on the road."

In order to capture his sound in the studio, Carlton's method over the years has always begun with a simple mic in front of the amp.

"I've had two extreme experiences when it comes to recording guitars in the studio," he details, "but it always starts with a basic microphone in front of the speaker. Depending on how that sounds, it goes from there.

"THE ES-335 I'VE PLAYED ALL THESE YEARS IS A '68, WHILE THE OTHER ONE WAS GIVEN TO ME BY A FAN"

"I've recorded albums where we've just put an SM57 in front of my amp, and that sounded great. Then I've recorded albums where we took three hours just trying to set up room mics – two mics in front, one 12 inches back and another placed 18 inches behind that. And that sounded great, too! So both ways have been successful for me.

"On the *Fire Wire* album [2005] we used some pretty extreme mic'ing techniques to get the exact attitude we wanted. We had one close mic and another set a few feet back, and then we also had a room mic about 16 feet away. The only leakage the room mic was hearing was my amp speaker that was in a booth. We opened the door of the booth so some of the sound would spill out into the big room, and that mic was hearing that leakage, and we blended those kinds of sounds together. On the other hand, my first Warner Brothers album [*Larry Carlton*, 1978] with *Room 335* on it, was just a simple Shure SM57 placed in front of the speaker."

When it comes to recording, Carlton prefers to try to capture the spontaneous spirit of the moment, rather than undertaking the laborious task of overdubbing – something that formed a big part of his early studio years. "For 90 per cent of the time, if not more now, my studio performance is captured on the session," he says. "It's just the way that it's come about over the years. On my earlier albums, I'd often overdub solos and parts. One example would be the session I did for *Kid Charlemagne*, where I did three or four takes. I played a few solos and finally got the one that I wanted. Then I picked it up again from the middle, and finished it – and that was it. But over the last 15 years, what you hear is what I got on that day."

BIG IN JAPAN

Not one to rest on his laurels, Larry Carlton now has several new projects on the go. His latest album, *Live In Tokyo* – first released in that country last year, but now set for a worldwide release this summer – sees him collaborating with blues-jazz exponent and friend Robben Ford. He's also started up his own record label called, inevitably enough, 335 Records.

"We're currently setting up distribution all around the world," he says excitedly. "The label is going to be an opportunity for me and anybody else I choose to do whatever the hell we want to do as musicians. It's a great thing at this stage of my life to afford that opportunity to myself and everybody else."

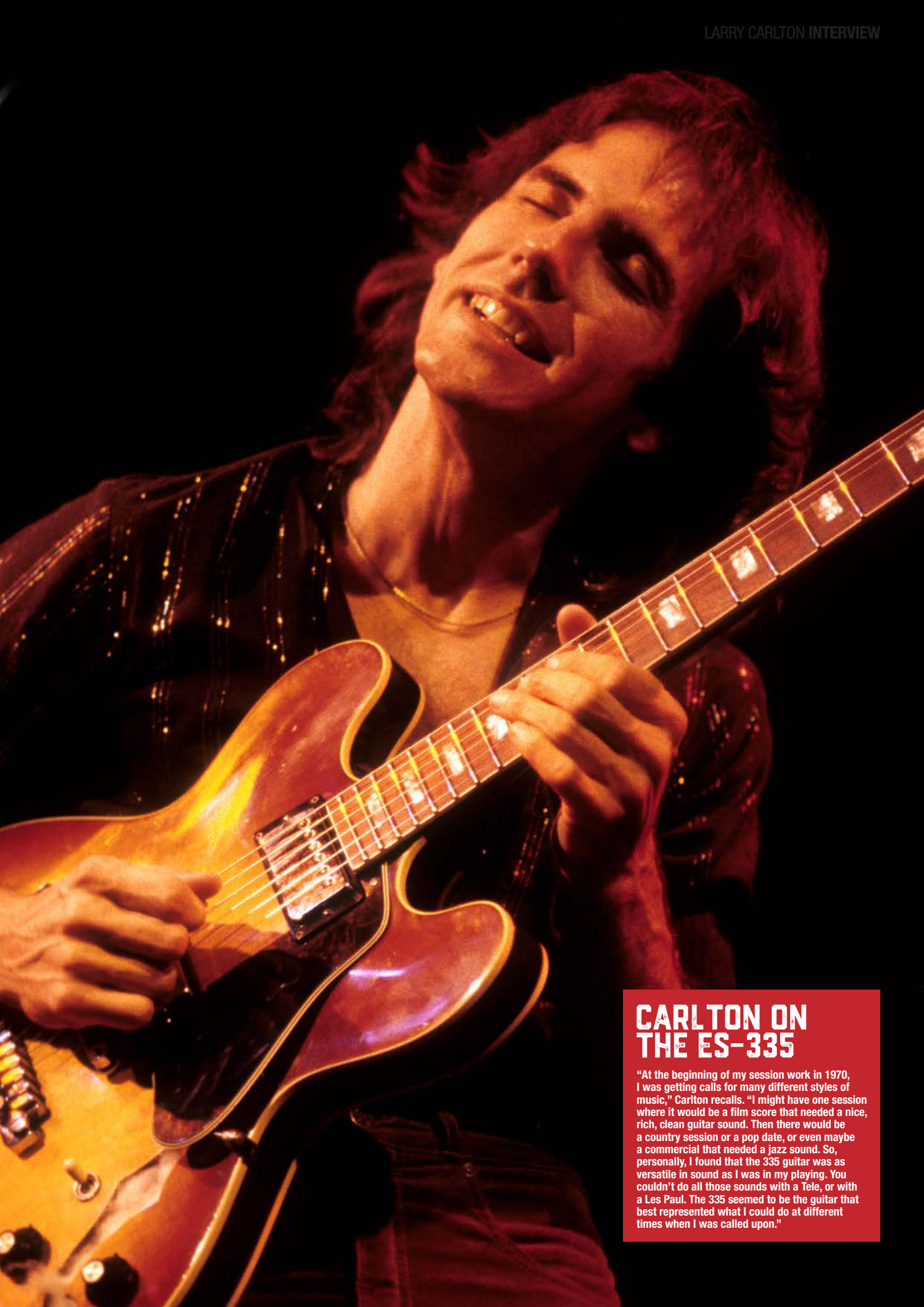
LIVING IN HARMONY

"The studying of harmony will make you a better player and will help you understand all about jazz guitar and what it's supposed to be doing – which also encompasses the technical side to things as well," says Carlton. "Timing is also is very important, and the ability to swing and to feel the music is unique to each one of us.

"I've heard some 'jazz guitarists' who don't swing very hard at all – they may play all the right notes, but it's not swinging, and I don't want to hear that. It all comes down to your natural gift of making music. Blues players have very little harmonic knowledge, but they swing so hard and can get the most meaning out of their vocabulary. Players like BB King or Albert Collins may play the same notes every night in a different order, but the feeling is so deep. It's where they put it – that's what's so important."

So what does Carlton think has been the secret to his success in an industry noted for its fickleness? "I think it's being versatile," he says. "I was definitely one of the first, if not the first, guy from my generation who could play so many styles so well.

"When I first started doing recording dates, there were only two sorts of players doing sessions; the 'legit' guitar players, who could read anything, and the rock-oriented and street-oriented guitar players who could only play one particular style and couldn't read any notes. I was the first guy to come onto the session scene that could read really well and who could play all kinds of styles. And that – the versatility that I have – has been my greatest blessing."



CARLTON ON THE ES-335

"At the beginning of my session work in 1970, I was getting calls for many different styles of music," Carlton recalls. "I might have one session where it would be a film score that needed a nice, rich, clean guitar sound. Then there would be a country session or a pop date, or even maybe a commercial that needed a jazz sound. So, personally, I found that the 335 guitar was as versatile in sound as I was in my playing. You couldn't do all those sounds with a Tele, or with a Les Paul. The 335 seemed to be the guitar that best represented what I could do at different times when I was called upon."

ERIC CLAPTON

WHEN WE SPOKE TO HIM IN FEBRUARY 1992, ERIC CLAPTON WAS RECOVERING FROM A TRAUMATIC YEAR IN THE BEST WAY HE KNEW – PLAYING MUSIC. HE WAS ON THE BRINK OF RELEASING A NEW ALBUM, *24 NIGHTS*, HE'D COAXED GEORGE HARRISON OUT OF RETIREMENT AND WAS TOURING THE UK. 'SLOWHAND' JUST CARRIES ON…

Words JOE JACKSON

Eric Clapton has never been so popular. For those who doubt this fact, there are sales figures to prove it. His last album, 1989's *Journeyman*, was the biggest selling of his career and he followed it up with landmark performances, such as his 24 record-breaking nights at the Royal Albert Hall in late 1990.

Hot on the heels of that gig comes the double album, *24 Nights*. Produced by Russ Titelman, whose past credits include work with Paul Simon, Randy Newman and Rickie Lee Jones, among others, its four sides subdivide into sets reflecting the different line-ups Clapton used for the gigs: four-piece band; blues band; his regular nine-piece band and most intriguingly of all, the National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Michael Kamen. Stripped down to only slightly beefed-up 12-bar basics are Clapton classics such as *Have You Ever Loved A Woman* with a line-up including Robert Cray, Buddy Guy and Johnnie Johnson; while *Hard Times* and *Edge Of Darkness* reach sci-fi proportions.

And yet the claim that Clapton is now more popular than ever carries within it the coded accusation that he may have had to dilute his original musical vision – if not sell out on his blues soul altogether – to achieve fame of such epic dimensions.

Before approaching Eric Clapton, one is warned not to ask questions about the recent, tragic accident in which his four-year-old son was killed. On 20 March 1991, Conor Clapton died after falling from a Manhattan apartment. One would not wish to intrude on a father's grief, of course, but less understandably, one is also asked not to enquire at all about Clapton's private life. It seems like a telling dictate, fuelling the fear that his music now can somehow be seen as an entity separated from real life; that he now may be the kind of musician who creates his product for an ever-expanding market, rather than as a form of musical autobiography.

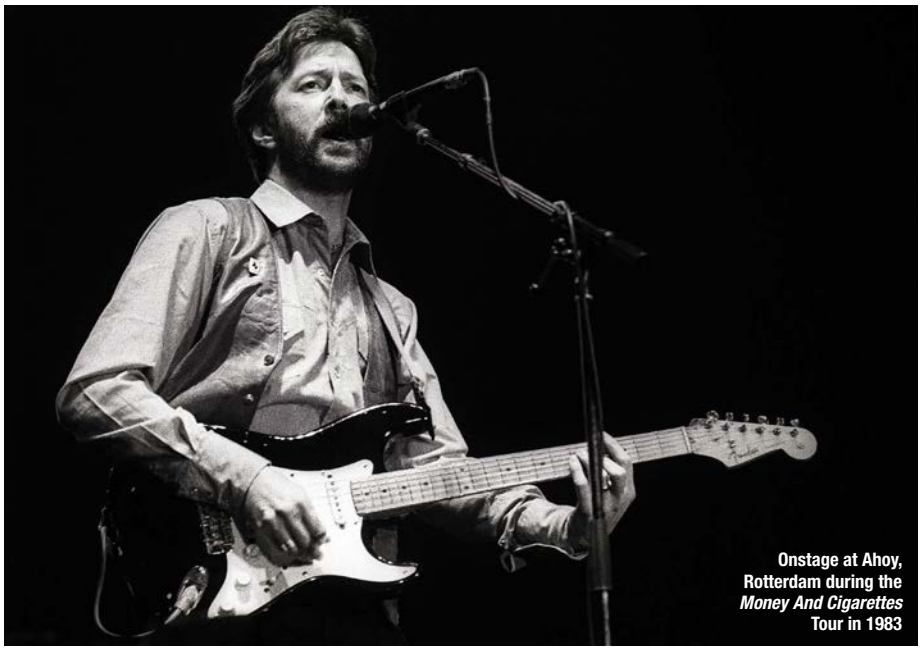
PERFECT SELECTION

But five minutes after meeting Clapton and discovering that in private, this guitar dervish is a softly spoken, somewhat self-conscious archetypal Englishman, one is ready for all preconceptions to be undone. Clapton says that *24 Nights* is a "memento" for fans who pack out his concerts and, maybe even more so, for those who can't make it to gigs like his annual 'party' at the Royal Albert Hall.

"Every time I tour around the world, fans come up and ask me: 'What was the Albert Hall like this year, how did it go?'. So this is their chance to hear for themselves," he says. "But I wanted songs that had that special atmosphere, good voice and good band and I didn't realise until I listened to the tapes how hard it would be to find songs in which everything did fit together during one single performance. There were 24 shows earlier this year and 12 last year and it was very difficult to

Clapton cradles his 'Blackie' Strat during sessions for *No Reason To Cry* at The Band's Shangri La studios in Malibu in 1975

"I MISS THAT ELEMENT OF BEING IN A BAND… BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT I REALLY LIKE BEING A LONER"



Onstage at Ahoy, Rotterdam during the *Money And Cigarettes* Tour in 1983

get even the selection we present on *24 Nights*. Because I wanted songs that were 'perfect'. I didn't want overdubs or fixes on this album at all and there are none."

Addressing the suggestion that *24 Nights* could also be seen as a quick cash-in job, Clapton says: "That is a trap you could fall into. But I'm still too much of a perfectionist to let that go by. This was postponed for a year because I didn't like it first time round and we had to record those 24 nights, do it all again, to try and find enough for me to be satisfied with. So that answers your question! If all I was chasing was 'product', I'd have put out this collection a year ago."

Another reason Clapton is meeting the press right now is to publicise his forthcoming tour with George Harrison. "The whole idea is that George should go, with my band, and perform songs that he's been famous for for nearly 30 years, from the time of The Beatles onwards. But the point is that he hasn't done live shows for nearly 15 years. And, despite working with the Wilburys, he considers himself to be retired from the music business, because he's so disillusioned with it all.

"But I told him that everywhere I played last year, people were asking: 'Where's George Harrison? What is he doing?', and so we started talking about doing some shows together. It's certainly not for business. I love touring, it's my favourite experience and I keep telling him that, yet his response is a cynical 'Really?'. He can't believe it, because 15 years without touring is a long time. And all the experience he had in his early days with The Beatles was bizarre, because they were playing for 10-year-olds through a set of, say, 40 minutes, knowing no one could hear them. Then they'd hop in a helicopter and be gone. And then when he did a solo tour 15 years ago, he lost his voice on the first night! That left him determined never to do it again. So these are the barriers we've to break down, and I hope we do."

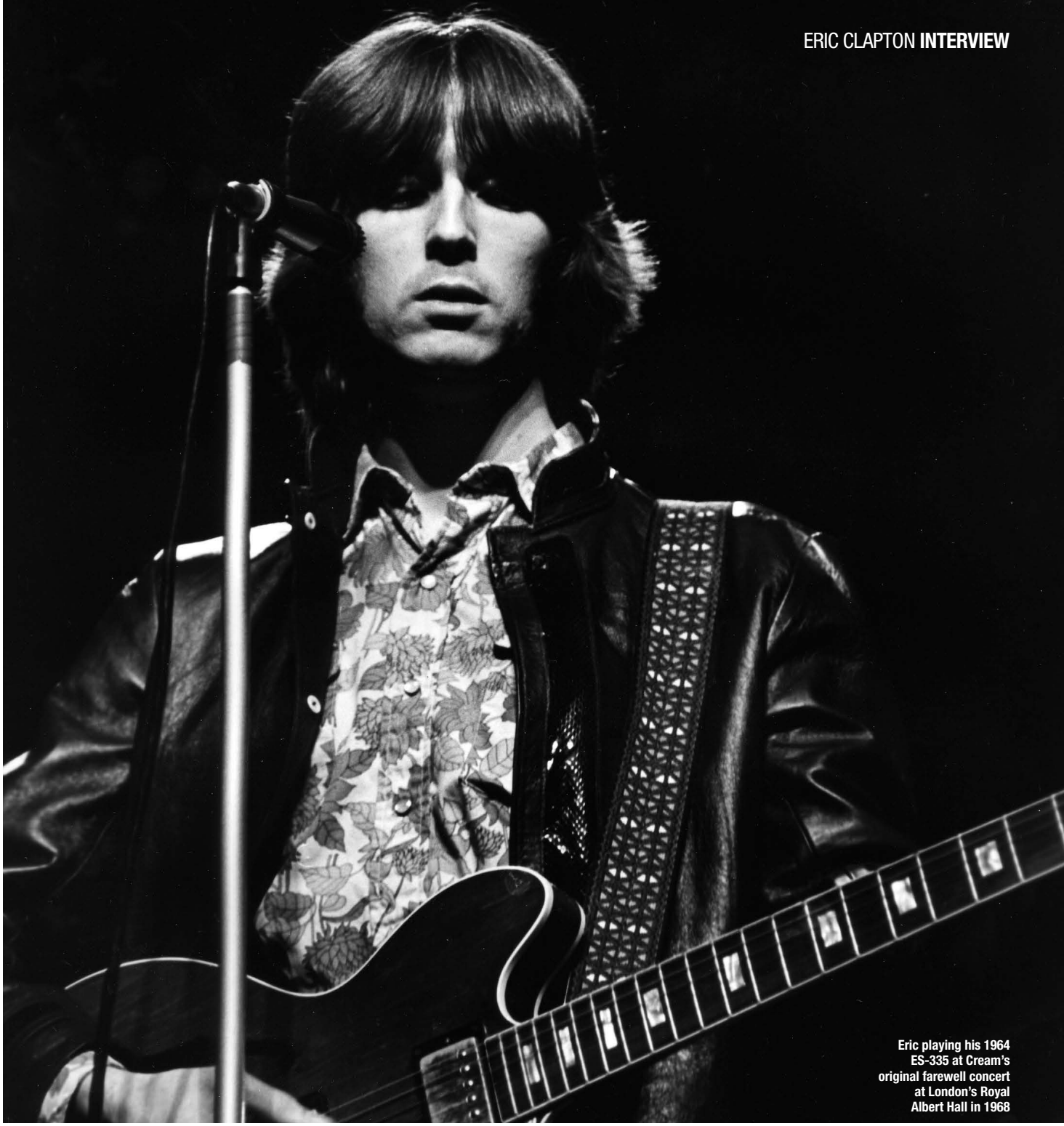
According to Clapton's long-serving tech, Lee Dickson, Clapton's rig for the current tour with Harrison is simpler than usual. "We're taking the Pete Cornish rack and routing system, but only using a couple of units in it, the [Dytronics CS-5] Tri Stereo Chorus and [TC Electronics] TC 2290."

Eric has switched from his former Marshalls to two Soldano SLO-100 heads, one of which is a backup. The current Strat line-up consists of three Signatures, two black, one pewter, strung with Ernie Ball Slinkys, gauge .010 to 0.46. Eric uses Ernie Ball hard custom picks.

STEPPIN' OUT ALONE

In contrast to his contemporaries, like Harrison or Keith Richards, Clapton's musical identity has always been that of a solo artist, despite the influential bands in which he's played. "I miss that element of being in a band a lot. But it's something I can't really do anything about. And the truth is that I really like being a loner. Because then, I have more freedom. I really prefer to be a leader and have all the freedom that entails."

Describing his work on the *Blues Breakers* album as "some of the most powerful I've ever



Eric playing his 1964 ES-335 at Cream's original farewell concert at London's Royal Albert Hall in 1968

recorded", he adds, "but at the time, I always wanted to make it clear to the people who bought the records that I got it from someone else." Speaking of Cream, Clapton reveals that he feels disinclined to dwell in the past, or get swallowed up by that beast called nostalgia: "It wasn't my idea to do the *Crossroads* set. Someone comes to me with an idea and I usually say: 'Fine, do it'. But the real truth is that I always need to be doing something now, something of the moment, not of the past. That's just how I am. Maybe it would be good if there was a Cream boxset. Just don't wait for me to do it!"

And yet the opening selection of songs on *24 Nights* is almost a Cream retrospective, including tracks like *Badge*, *White Room* and *Sunshine Of Your Love*. What does Clapton feel he can add to these songs more than 20 years later? "I don't know how much you can add, apart from how you feel today. The only way I can approach my music is by imagining that inside my head is a little filing system containing everything that's happened to me, musically, through the years. So, if you throw me on stage and press a particular button, certain songs are still songs I want to do. So all I can add to them is the way I sing now, or the sound of the way I play the guitar now, plus the choice of musicians I play with. Like the way the drummer here will treat *White Room*, or the way the bass player will interpret his part in *Sunshine Of Your Love*. So, although I think we stick to the core of the spirit of the original songs, we add an overall interpretation that is very much 1991 to me."

It was while he was playing with Cream that Clapton's sound moved beyond his interpretations of the likes of BB and Freddie King into a whole new genre. At the time, Clapton said that his only musical goal was to further extend his skill at improvisation, citing the then-influential example of Indian music as a format which abandoned conventional structure. But later, it was the emphasis on soloing that caused him to move on, though Clapton claims never to know where his style is leading him: "I don't really ever know where it's going. But I do feel that as you get older, you have more respect for your instrument.

"Also, living a different kind of life and not being into drugs or drink now, my focus has come back onto the serious aspects of what I do as a guitarist. People call me a purist and I think that's true. I'm very self critical and, as much as I try not to, I've got a very, very tunnel vision. I'm very specific about what I like to play and what I even like listening to. And, for me, musically, the criteria is that something either has, or hasn't, got soul. If it doesn't

Clapton playing the Royal Albert Hall in 2015, to celebrate both his 70th birthday and 50 years since he first played the venue

move me, then I just ignore it. And as it was from the beginning, I still have to get a similar feeling from playing the guitar."

LIVE ALIVE

It's often suggested that the best of Clapton's guitar work was created before a live audience rather than in a studio. Similarly, on *24 Nights* there are moments when he seems to be attempting to burst beyond the capacities of his guitar: "That certainly is a conscious attempt to go as far as I can with the limited technique I have," he suggests. "And that's why, for example, I like working with musicians who challenge me in some way. I did a thing with Kate Bush recently and when she originally asked me to play for her, I said to myself: 'Where do we meet, musically?'. I love her music, but I can't see myself in it! I find that difficult, but it's good for me. Because I know that I will learn something from what they want of what I have! Or learn something about my own limitations in terms of what I can use in that framework."

Clapton admits he has no time for the American 'let's-see-who-is-the-fastest-dude-in-town' approach to guitar playing. "I've never belonged to that school of thought. When I started to play there were very few playing like me and we became the role models for the people that came after us. Van Halen says he learned to play by listening to my music slowed down! But when I hear his music, I don't hear me at all. So I'm afraid I can't be held responsible for that. The only time I feel I'm in a so-called 'rivalry' setup is when I'm with someone who is on the same territory as me. Like Buddy Guy or Robert Cray. But the great thing is that then, there is no real sense of competition. It's fun.

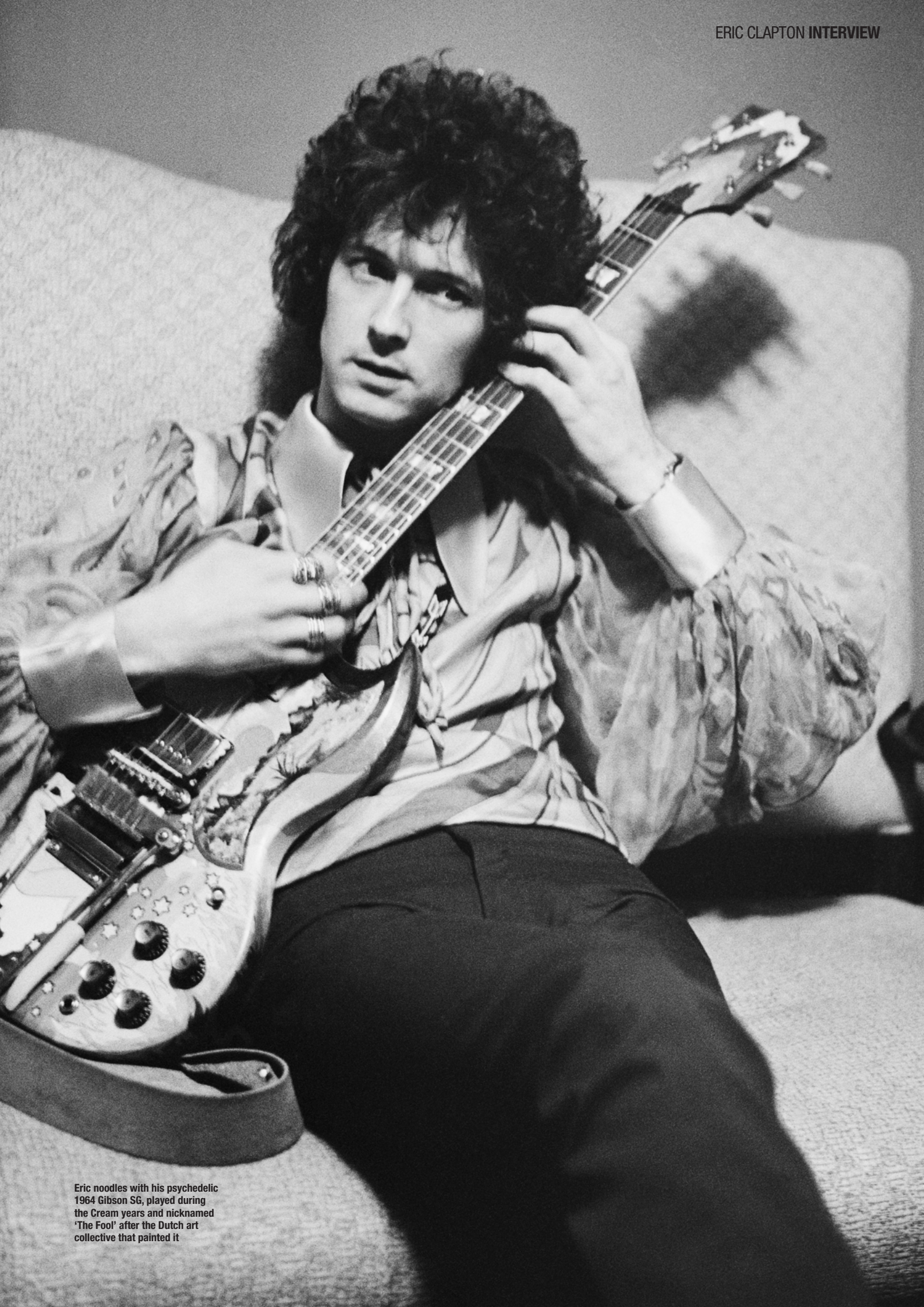
> "AND, FOR ME, MUSICALLY, THE CRITERIA IS THAT SOMETHING EITHER HAS, OR HASN'T, GOT SOUL"

"I don't think we would ever play anything to hurt someone else or to make another guitarist look foolish. Whereas I know there are guitar players in the younger school who like to do that, and I won't join in that game. So if I get up on stage with a young guitar player who wants to be extremely aggressive, I would let him 'beat' me, if that's all he's after."

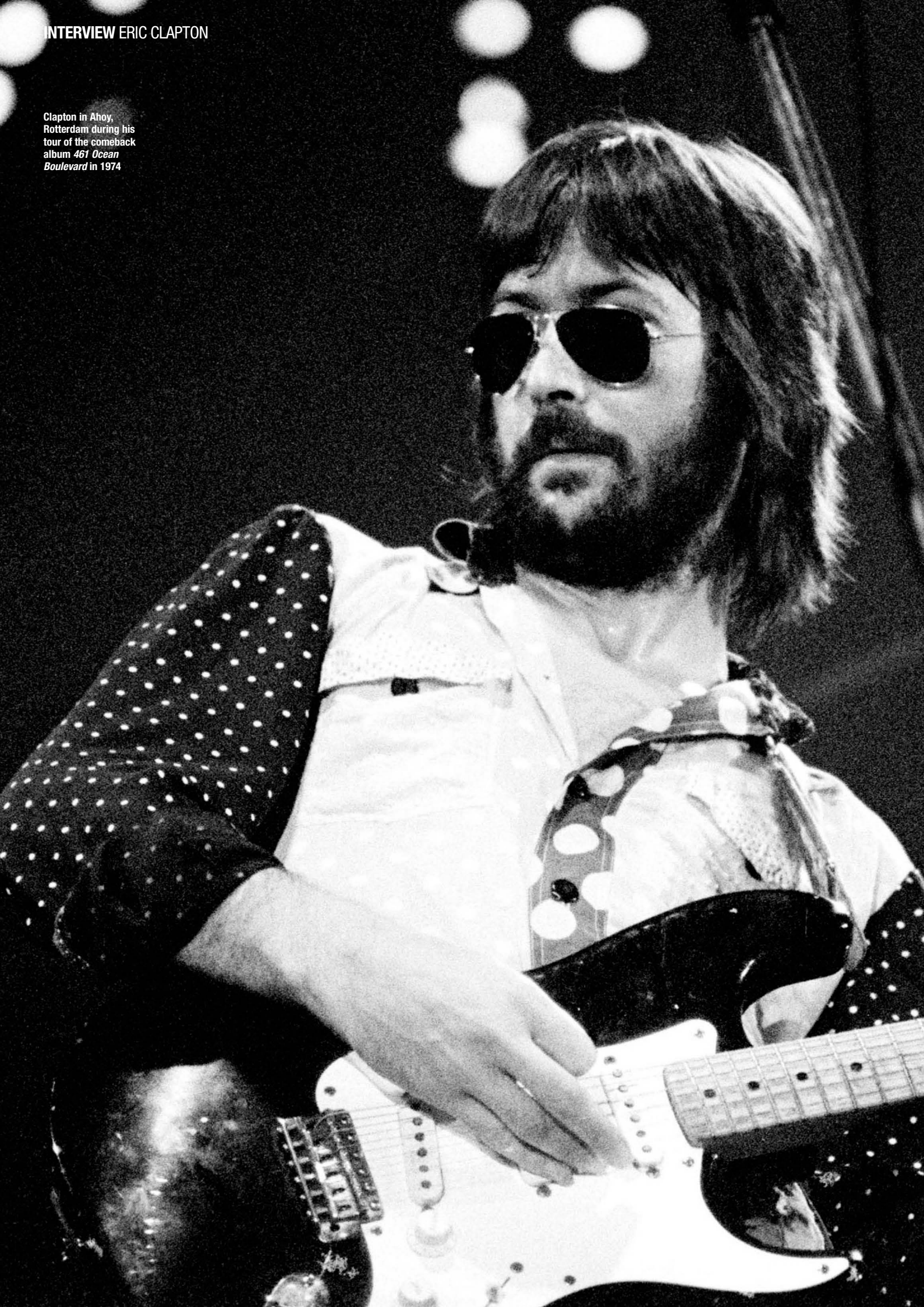
GUITAR FAMILY

So how would Eric Clapton describe his own guitar style in 1991? "It's inspired by Stevie Ray Vaughan, that's for sure. The album he made with Jimmie [1990's Nile Rodgers-produced *Family Style*] had some of the finest guitar sounds I've ever heard. And it had something to do with being on an amplifier very, very low – so you can 'hear' the string on the fingernail, almost. And I've been trying to play like that more. With the score for the movie *Rush*, which I've just finished, I've been playing very, very quietly, so if I hit a note and hold it with vibrato, you can hear it just sizzling against the fret. But not very loud. You have to strain to hear it. And I love that. It's different from the big, big sound people are more used to."

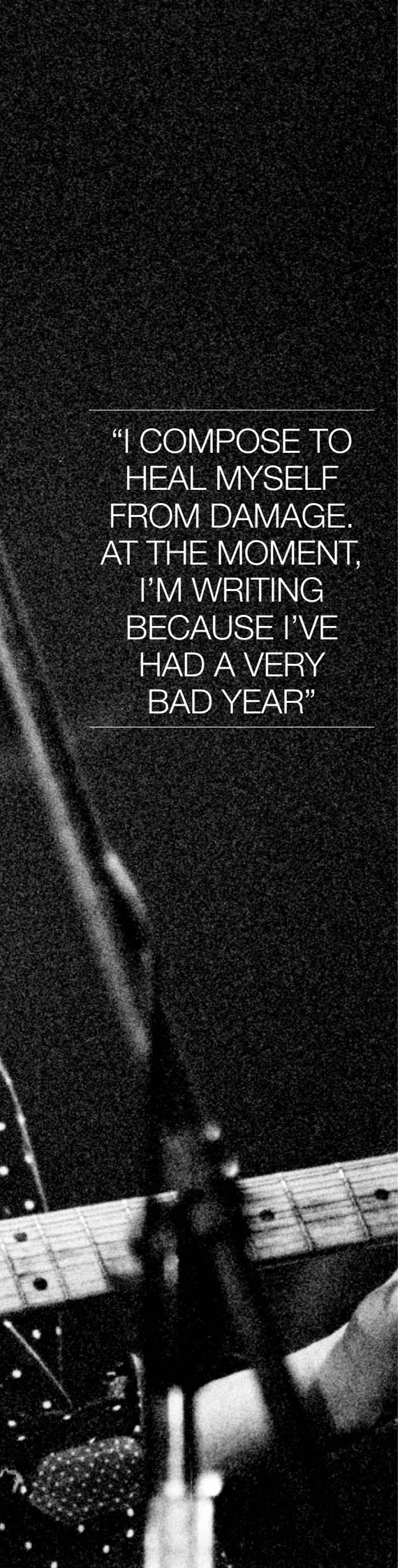
Edge Of Darkness, written for a BBC TV series in 1985, was Clapton's first serious and successful attempt at writing soundtrack material. An avid classical music fan who once chose Bizet and Puccini alongside Prince's *Purple Rain* to take as his Desert Island Discs, he also includes on *24 Nights* a selection of songs from the 'Clapton Concerto', which he and Michael Kamen will release at some future



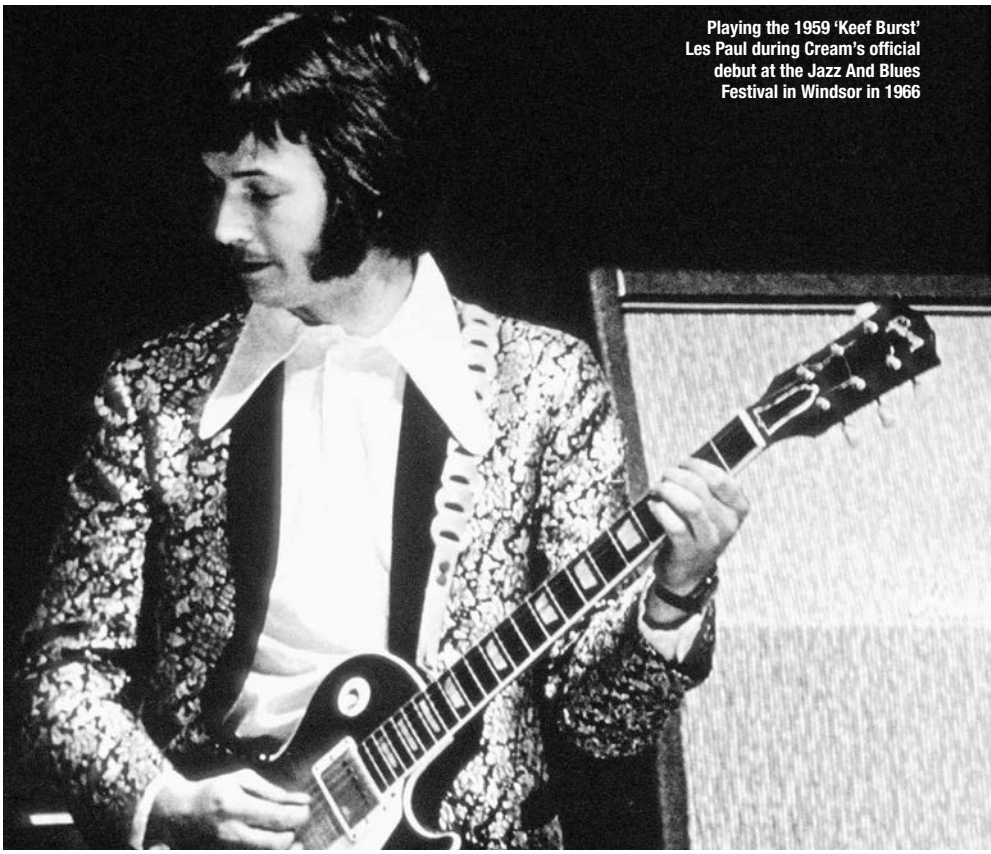
Eric noodles with his psychedelic 1964 Gibson SG, played during the Cream years and nicknamed 'The Fool' after the Dutch art collective that painted it



Clapton in Ahoy, Rotterdam during his tour of the comeback album *461 Ocean Boulevard* in 1974



"I COMPOSE TO HEAL MYSELF FROM DAMAGE. AT THE MOMENT, I'M WRITING BECAUSE I'VE HAD A VERY BAD YEAR"



Playing the 1959 'Keef Burst' Les Paul during Cream's official debut at the Jazz And Blues Festival in Windsor in 1966

date. But as a guitarist/composer, Clapton is clearly most excited about writing for film.

"It's something I decided I'd never make a living at because (a) it doesn't incorporate an audience and (b) it's too hard! But now I see it has a lot of rewards. It's great to go into a cinema and see a movie and hear your music wrapped up in it. I'd like to do more films in future, but I need to have the theory and technique under my belt so that I don't have to ask any questions."

It is while contrasting this style of writing with his approach to composing blues and pop songs (which, he claims, demands that he tap into his own feelings), that Clapton himself first touches on the seemingly taboo subject of Conor's death.

"I was having problems composing of late," he says. "I don't compose songs, say, in a normal day. It's not something I particularly enjoy. In fact, I only compose songs if I'm in an emotional state. If I'm experiencing extreme happiness, extreme sadness or grief, then I compose because I have to fix myself. I compose to heal myself from damage. At the moment, I'm writing because I've had a very bad year. Terrible things happened, so I was forced to compose. But when we made *Journeyman*, for example, what was happening in my life? I had a love affair. Big deal," he laughs. "I wrote one song about that love affair."

WRITING AS RECOVERY

"But I have started composing songs for the next album," Clapton continues. "There are already six songs which I've started recording in Los Angeles. The songs are about my son. I've three on tape and there are three more. And every day, I start to work on other ones. It's happening all the time. I'm writing continually, because I need to. This is the way I repair myself, recover from the tragedy."

Isn't he afraid, though, that however therapeutic writing songs about Conor may be for him, they may end up as too personal for public consumption, or that in releasing them he may, in some way, violate his relationship with his son?

"That is difficult," he says. "Where do you draw the line? I don't know. My attitude towards my son is that I owe it to him. I've lost him. What am I going to do? I have to pay my respects to that boy, in my way, and let the world know what I thought about him. I don't want to make it a secret.

"I'll talk to anyone, anywhere about it, because that helps me to get over the death. And writing songs helps me. And I know that people in England, say, who are dear fans, want to know what I think and feel about Conor's death."

After the death of his son, Eric Clapton went into hibernation at his home in London. Now that he has resurfaced, does he fear he may make the mistake of expecting too much from his music, make it the emotional centre of his universe?

"That would be disastrous," he replies. "But it is a possibility. I did find that when I made that tape of the three songs I've finished, I suddenly was chilled by the thought that I'm never going to have to play them anymore. And now I have got a void. It's like if I do make an album of these songs and just put them away, it will be like letting go of Conor. It would be a form of musical burial. So that, too, is part of the reason I have to perform them."

Performing at the Prince's Trust Gala in 2010 at the Royal Albert Hall, with a single-P-90-equipped Gibson L-5

BACK AT THE CROSSROADS

For all the tragedy that has befallen him, Clapton has no problems judging as "ludicrous" blues nuts who believe that, like Robert Johnson or maybe even Stevie Ray Vaughan, he had to travel into the deepest darkness of 'the devil's music' in order to pay his dues.

"That's a good little fantasy for young people, but the point about Stevie Ray, for example, is that he had been three-years sober before he died," he points out. "He was living a great, honest life, being a fantastic human being. And he was up the ladder very high, musically. There was no one near him. That was my first thought. Maybe it was time for him to go, because he couldn't get any better as a musician. I'd rather think that than the Robert Johnson syndrome. But how the hell do I know? In fact, he could have gotten better and better and better. So I really don't think it's wise to try to summarise why these things happen. Conor's death or Stevie Ray's death."

Looking back at Keith Moon, Joplin, Hendrix, Morrison or even remembering the fact that two of the musicians who played with him on *Layla* are now dead, does Clapton ever stop and ask himself: 'Why didn't that happen to me? Why am I so blessed?'

"Why am I so blessed? Yes, because clearly I am," he replies. "There is a reason, but I don't think I'm supposed to know it. Maybe if I was given even an inkling of why it wasn't me, I'd probably go insane. So the simple way of me looking at this question is to think that because it wasn't me, I do have a responsibility to express my gratitude for still being alive after everything I've experienced. And the best way I can do that is by making it accessible to people that enjoy it."

Looking back, does Eric Clapton feel he had to compromise his musical vision, sell out in any way, in order to become one of the world's most popular recording and live artists?

"I have made compromises, yes. But I don't know that the popularity I have is a result of that. I hope the popularity is a result of a kind of consistent struggle to just keep going. The thing I hear most from fans who have been around a long time is that 'old slowhand just carries on'. And I do. And I don't try to change too much."

> "AT THE END OF THE DAY, OR NIGHT, PLAYING MUSIC IS STILL WHAT GIVES ME THE GREATEST PLEASURE IN LIFE"

KEEP IT SIMPLE

"The best advice I ever got in this business was when Muddy Waters told me to 'keep it simple' and to be true to myself. That's all I ever tried to do. And that's exactly what I'm going to keep on doing. And as for fame and money, they don't take away despair or any of that stuff, believe me. They can add to it, because there's a lot extra to contend with. The more people I employ, the more responsibilities I have. I almost have to work to feed mouths, almost have to put on a show because I have a staff of people who depend on me to do that. And in the process, I make money and I like to make money because I like to spend it. I don't have a businessman's approach to life. I don't want to amass money. I don't want to get involved in investment. But because I originally came from a poor background, I enjoy money.

"But I sure as hell know from experience that this isn't going to remove me from the emotional hardships of life. In fact, I learned the hard way that if you look to that for support and security and for love, you won't find it. At the end of the day, or night, playing music is still what gives me the greatest pleasure in life."

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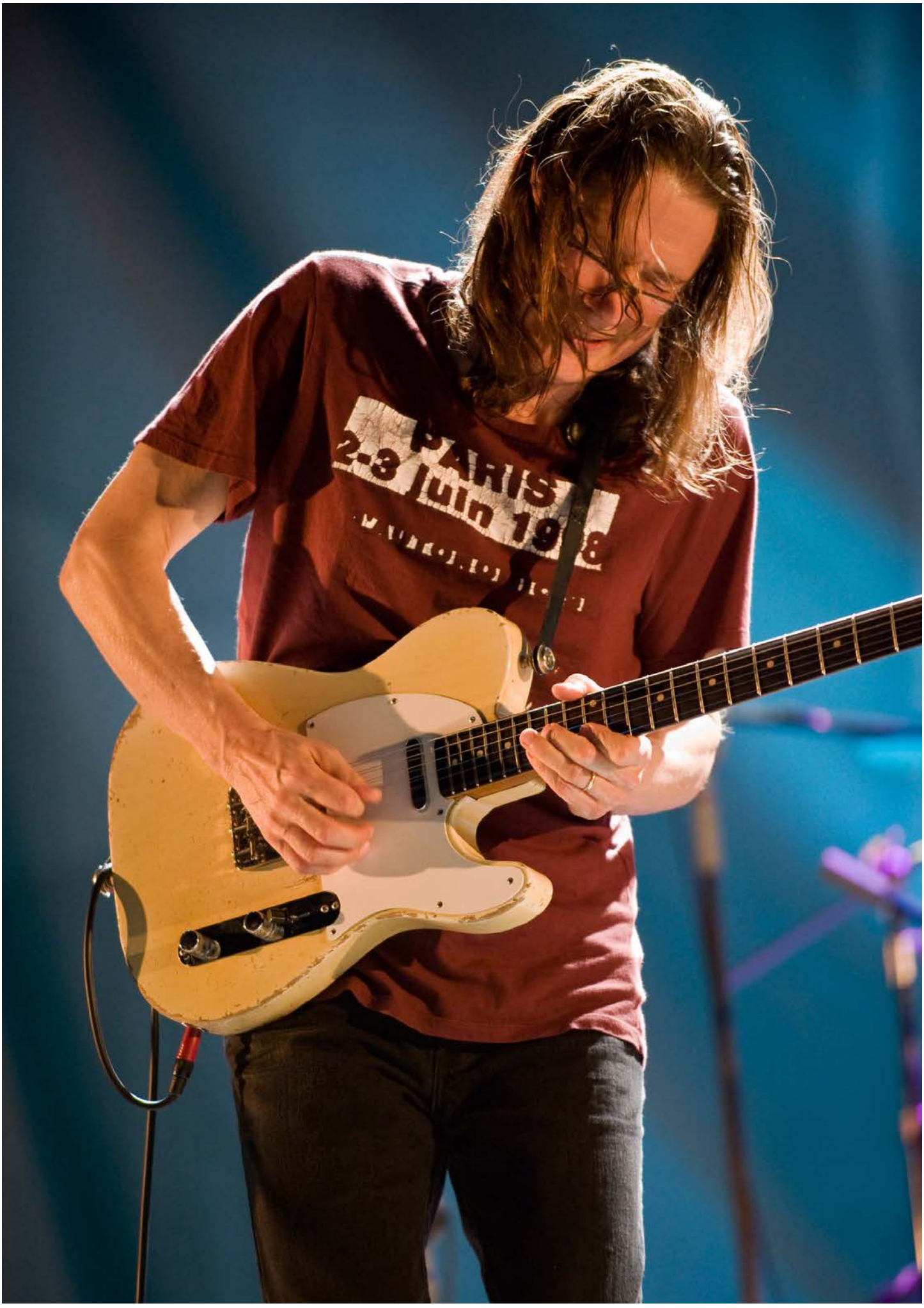
Playing his trusty 'Blackie' Strat on 1983's *Money And Cigarettes* Tour, two years before the guitar was reluctantly retired due to 'neck issues'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ROBBEN FORD

Robben Ford has played with, well, just about everyone, but for a world-respected guitarist he remains entirely focused on the joy of playing. Here, he talks technique, different band formats and session playing in this interview from February 2007...

Words JULIAN PIPER

Robben Ford's voice can barely contain his excitement. "Hey, we had Stevie Winwood jump up with us last night!" Winwood's impromptu stage invasion is easily explained by the fact that Ford's latest album includes a storming rendition of The Spencer Davis Group's old hit *Keep On Running*, but such unbridled enthusiasm from a man who's well used to hobnobbing with the musical A-list – think Joni Mitchell, George Harrison, even Miles Davis – is quite a surprise. Ford's beatific mood also tells us that his first-ever sustained UK tour is going rather well. "I'm touring with just bass and drums this time around," he enthuses. "Having the trio makes it a lot easier to improvise. I end up playing differently every night; there's a lot more space, and I also end up simply playing more."

The prodigiously talented Robben Ford kicked off his career playing saxophone and guitar in the Charlie Musselwhite Band, a respected outfit on the late-60s San Francisco blues scene. With the Summer Of Love a fading memory, harder-edged blues-based acts like the Steve Miller Band and the nascent Santana were calling the shots. Musselwhite was a stellar harmonica player who had hung out with Mike Bloomfield in rough-and-ready Chicago South Side blues joints, jamming with the locals like Junior Wells and Buddy Guy before he was even old enough to buy a shot of bourbon. "Charlie didn't like my guitar playing – he thought I played too many notes!" Robben recalls. "So I wound up trying to dumb my playing down, playing really laid back and not aggressively. I went to Chicago with him, and a month later, we were opening up for Muddy Waters in a club in San Francisco, and he came and sat in with us. When Muddy went back to Chicago, he told the Chess brothers about the band, and they sent us a recording contract – but my younger brother Mark quit, so it wound up not happening."

GUITAR SWAPPING

Next, Ford joined veteran bluesman Jimmy Witherspoon, turning his back on the saxophone and dedicating himself to hunching over a big-bodied sunburst Gibson L-5 and concentrating on refining the slick fusion of jazz and blues that remains his trademark style to this day. "No one was going to hire me to play saxophone, believe me!" Ford laughs. "I found the guitar a much more natural instrument, and soon started getting calls from other people to play for them."

Robben Ford had chosen his Gibson L-5 model in tribute to great jazz players like Kenny Burrell and Wes Montgomery, but the floating bridge gave him constant tuning problems; on his next instrument, a Gibson Super 400, he solved the problem by having

Ford playing at the Park West Auditorium in Chicago in 1979

Robben Ford playing at the Guitar Town festival in Copper Mountain, Colorado in 2005

STUDIO BLUES

"When I first started getting called for studio sessions, I had several bad experiences, mainly because I didn't read music – and I still don't," Robben Ford grins. "A lot of what was going on was all just over my head. "After I'd played with Tom Scott And The L.A. Express, I got called for all kinds of stuff, but I was never prepared to go in there with the right amp and the right effects and stuff. Sometimes, I'd take jobs because they paid good money, even if I felt that I had no business being there around all these incredible musicians!

"One time I was really on the spot and the engineer kept calling out: 'I can't hear the guitar player! I can't hear the guitar player!'" The reason was, I wasn't playing anything, because I didn't know what to play… That was embarrassing!"

the bridge screwed firmly to the top. Next, he went thinline. He was hired by Tom Scott And The L.A. Express, a highly rated West Coast fusion unit, to tour a songwriter's album that featured another great guitarist. The guitarist was Larry Carlton [interviewed on p22]; so Ford's new guitar was an ES-335; the album was *Court And Spark* and the songwriter, of course, was Joni Mitchell.

"The best experiences I have had have always been with great 'leaders', and the three best times were with 'Spoon, Joni Mitchell and Miles Davis," he says. "They all made you want to play your best; you'd do anything to make them feel and sound good. It's a lot more pleasure than fronting a band, and I learned most about what it is to make music from those three people."

Hoping to spend time woodshedding his jazz licks, Ford initially rejected a request by Tom Scott to tour with George Harrison, and it wasn't until the ex-Beatle asked him personally that he agreed. "I went straight from working with Joni to the first L.A. Express album to rehearsing with George Harrison. An amazing year," he admits. "I was used to being around highly evolved musicians, and after that, I didn't find George's music very challenging. I don't mean that as an insult! George had a very big personality and a very strong thing on the guitar; everything he played had weight to it and real musical integrity. The only problem was that he never felt comfortable in the bandleader's role. He only did it that once!"

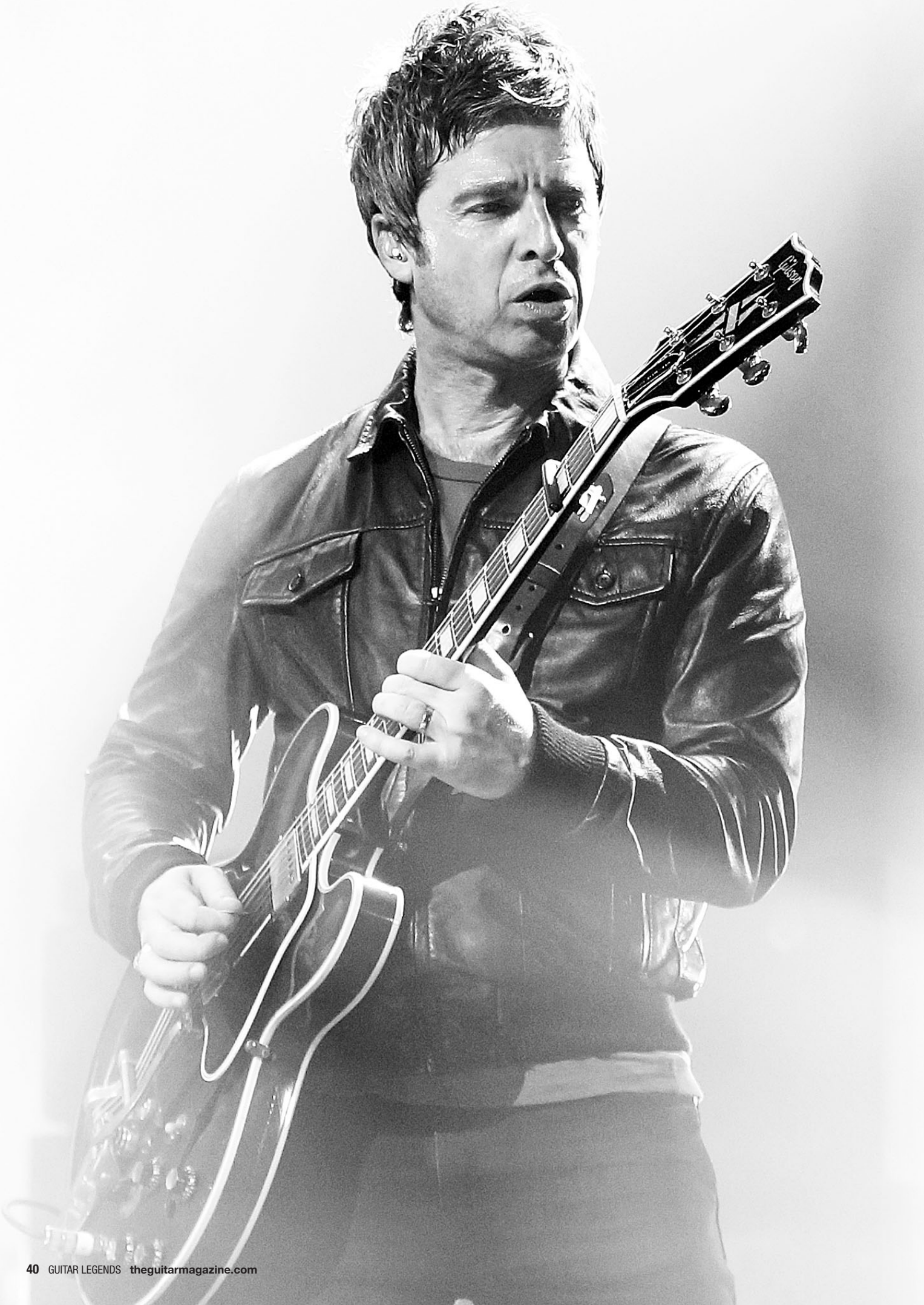
In 1986, Ford was invited on tour with his long-time idol, Miles Davis. One small problem: he had just five days to get ready... "It was a nightmare!" he laughs. "I didn't meet Miles until the night of the first gig. It was so terrifying, I was lying down in the back seat of the van thinking I was going to throw up!

"Miles could be very intimidating, and he could walk all over you if you let him. We got on well, but some of the other guys in the band were always going: "Oh God, Miles doesn't like what I'm doing!". I didn't really care. If he tried to intimidate you, he was really just screwing around, just trying to push your buttons and see what you'd do. If you can't play because you're afraid of your boss, you shouldn't be there – you should just leave!"

"LISTENING TO SAX PLAYERS WAS THE THING THAT SAVED ME, AND HELPED ME DEVELOP MY OWN GUITAR STYLE"

Since the release of his 1988 album *Talk To Your Daughter*, Robben has concentrated on a solo career that owes more to blues than to jazz. "I feel that I've found a way to put it all together," he explains. "My different influences are all there – jazz, blues, rock... everything happens, but if you're a guitar player spending all your time listening to other guitar players, inevitably, you're going to end up like the people you're listening to.

"Listening to saxophone players was the thing that saved me, and helped me develop my own style. Music for me is an art and it's about communication and creativity, and not about getting on the radio so you can make lots of money and be famous."



NOEL GALLAGHER

Punch-ups... booze... drugs... bare-faced arrogance... In 1994, Oasis came from nowhere and established the perfect credentials for rock 'n' roll infamy. But behind the headlines, Noel Gallagher was fighting to prove himself the best songwriter of his generation. We urged you to believe the hype in this interview from September 1994

Words CLIFF JONES

Have you ever been really moved by rock 'n' roll? Moved to the point where you feel like screaming out with pleasure – the point at which that rising knot in your stomach tells you you're witnessing something that's going to change everything? Have you ever been moved by rock 'n' roll to the point where you can almost touch its indefinable urgency and smell its pheromone potency? Has the sheer power of three-chord pop ever thrilled you to the point where you've almost cried?

Oasis have reached the delirious finale to a devastating 40-minute set packed full of pop shrapnel bombs. Singer Liam Gallagher stands motionless, radiating post-adolescent cool, staring out at the audience. Guitarist Noel Gallagher has his head down, cutting up the air with those dangerous machete power riffs, weird delays and snarling feedback squalls. Rhythm ace Bonehead is busy sawing away at his guitar, while bassist Paul McGuigan is doing his best John Entwistle impression, standing as inert as a mannequin, barely fretting those monstrous bass notes. Their now infamous cover of the Fab Four's *I Am The Walrus* crescendoes into wide, great arcs of ear-splittingly loud feedback, whch bounces around the room as the band depart from the stage one by one.

Imagine the Sex Pistols deconstructing the semi-orchestral mush of The Beatles' original, turning it into a *Pretty Vacant*-style powerchord guitar anthem and you might get some idea of the breed of Oasis's ...*Walrus*. Sometimes, it takes one brief moment like this to clear away the accumulated crapola of a million tedious rock 'n' roll write-ups and a million mediocre rock 'n' roll pretenders. Tonight was like hearing rock 'n' roll for the very first time.

And before you reach for a hefty pinch from the salt barrel, this isn't more 'new future of rock 'n' roll' shtick and I'm not the only one raving. Among his admirers,

Noel Gallagher debuting his iconic Epiphone Union Jack Sheraton at Maine Road, Manchester, in 1996

Noel Gallagher can count Johnny Marr, Pete Townshend, Bobby Gillespie, the entire music press and, most recently, Ian McNabb and Neil Young's grizzled old lags, Crazy Horse. Noel was asked to guest with McNabb/Crazy Horse at one of the band's recent London shows on a finale version of Sky Sunlight Saxon's awesome 60s punker, *Pushin' Too Hard*. It was a dream come true for Noel, himself a huge Neil Young fan. "I thought: 'What the fuck, this is Crazy Horse and I'm up here on stage with 'em.' I'm just this bloke who was on the dole a year ago and now it's all gone insane."

For his part, McNabb was amazed by the licks he heard falling from the 26-year-old guitarist's fingers. "We couldn't really hear what Noel was up to when we were up there 'cos it was so loud, but I've just listened back to the DATs of the gig and I was gobsmacked. Noel was playing like Peter fuckin' Green!" Johnny Marr has shown his esteem by donating a vintage Les Paul Standard to Noel, gratis (more of which later).

It's called the Oasis effect and, once you've seen them, you'll be a convert, too – be you a metal-head, old blueser or grunge monster. What Oasis have is attitude by the yard and some of the greatest pop this side of 1966.

> **"SONGWRITING, FOR ME, IS ABOUT DOING STUFF YOUR MILKMAN WHISTLES AS HE DELIVERS HIS PINTS"**

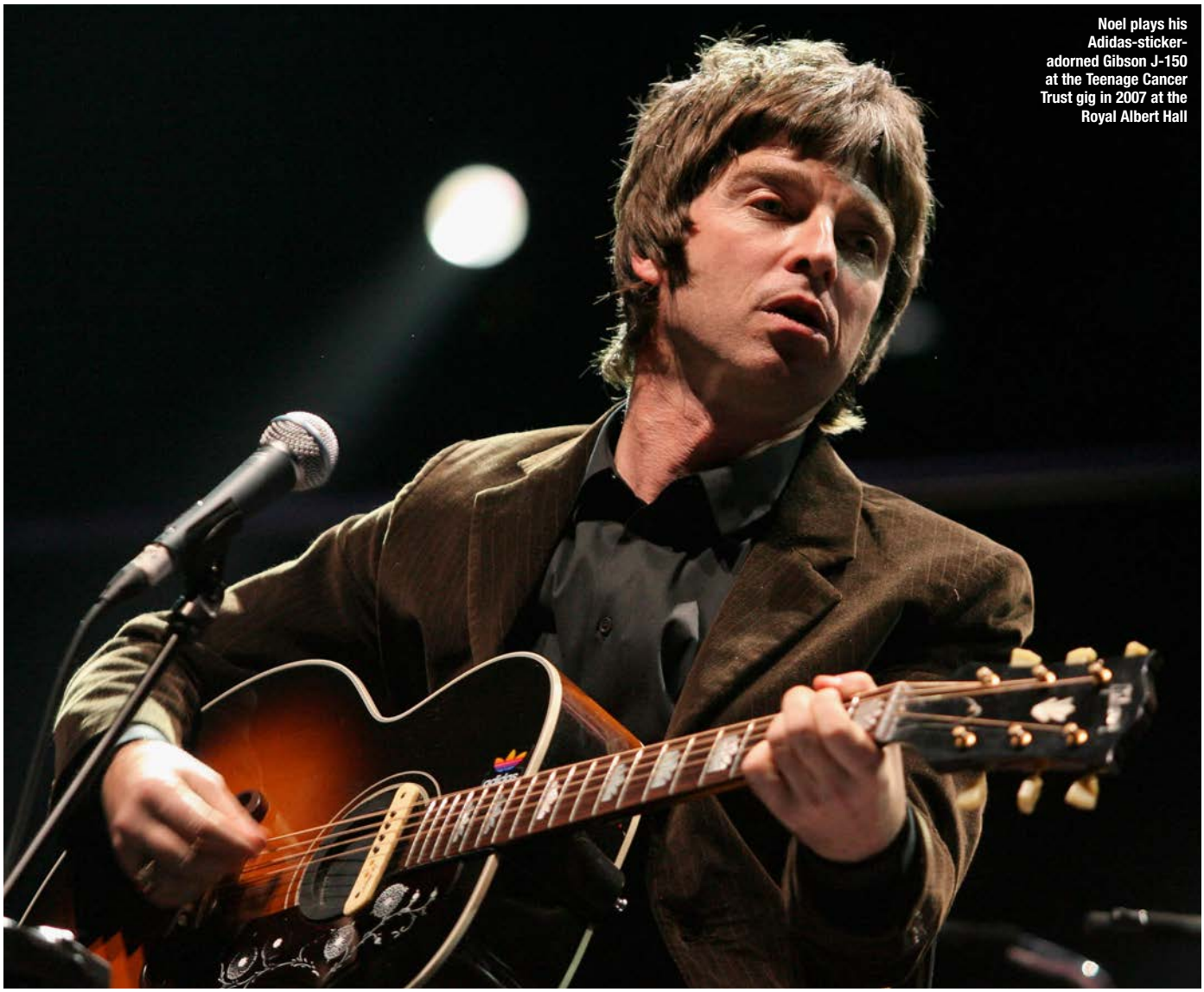
For their part, the band seem to have taken such accolades in their stride. "We always knew it would be this way," says Noel, sipping his favoured gin and tonic in a London bar. "We're not going to apologise for being successful. If you don't want to be bigger than The Beatles, then it's just a hobby. People keep going on about it being overnight success for us, but we've been together three years, so if anything, we've got a lot of catching up to do. Some bands form and inside six months, they've got a record out. Well, for them the sort of success we've had may be too much too soon, 'cos they don't have the songs to back it up. S*M*A*S*H, Echobelly, Elastica and all them don't have the songs, they're embarrassed by success and they're so boring and dour.

"There's not enough humour in music. Look at Suede with all this 'together in the nuclear sky' bollocks. I'm sorry, but the Cold War is over, Brett. Let's talk about beer and fags and lasagne instead. Even Bowie had a sense of humour. He wrote the fuckin' *Laughing Gnome*, didn't he? Oasis aim to be universal. 'She loves you yeah yeah yeah'... that's in every karaoke bar between here and Timbuktu."

Noel, it should be known, has very serious aspirations, in a Burt Bacharach, Jimmy Webb, 'universal songwriter' kind of vein. "I wanna write songs that will stand up like *This Guy's In Love With You* by Bacharach. Songwriting, for me, is about doing stuff that your middle-aged milkman whistles as he delivers his pints. No one's gonna hum a Sonic Youth tune, are they?"

GUITAR TECH TO GUITAR HERO

As you'll have realised by now, Gallagher's theories and rants about modern music don't



Noel plays his Adidas-sticker-adorned Gibson J-150 at the Teenage Cancer Trust gig in 2007 at the Royal Albert Hall

exactly err on the side of the conservative. While it may seem pointlessly bitchy, a bit of rivalry is actually just what the doctor ordered – the perfect pick-me-up for pop's frail, wheezing body.

Oasis were born in Burnage, near Manchester, three years ago [at the time of writing] when Liam Gallagher (22-year-old, doe-eyed, sharp-dressed vocalist) decided to form a band while brother Noel was away on tour as the Inspiral Carpets' guitar tech. Despite the backroom job, Noel himself had songwriting aspirations early on. Brought up on The Beatles' 'Red' and 'Blue' albums – "It's all there, the beginning until the end" – he began playing the guitar when his father bought him an acoustic and, by the age of 13, he was teaching his dad.

His proficiency was the result of a classic delinquent background, robbing corner shops, glue sniffing, bunking school, etc. It was while on probation that he concentrated on the guitar. "There was fuck all else to do," he reflects. He spent the late 80s following The Stone Roses around, taking drugs and going to gigs before taking the Inspirals' shilling.

"It wasn't 'cos I liked 'em, but 'cos I had a talent for taking guitars apart and putting 'em back together. I got to see the world and got paid £400 a week."

Noel arrived home in Manchester on the evening of Oasis' debut gig. "The music was terrible, but they had something and I was dead proud. Bonehead's a solid rhythm player and our kid was a natural frontman." Of their inauspicious debut, Bonehead recalls: "We were bloody terrible and about 20 of our mates turned up and got embarrassed, but to us then, we were the best fuckin' band going."

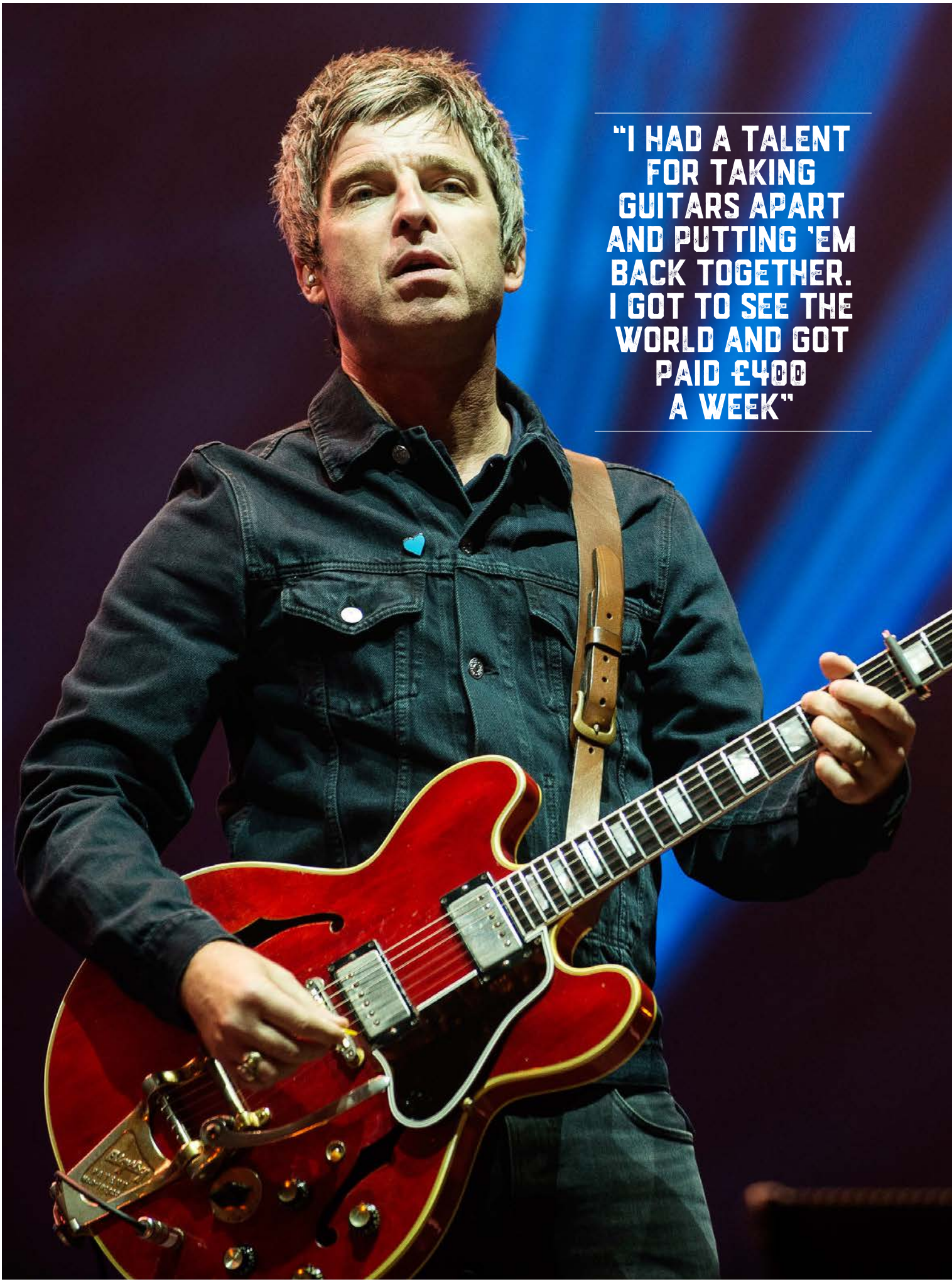
Noel delivered an ultimatum: either he joined the band as sole songwriter and they went global, or else "you stay in Manchester like sad cunts the rest of your lives". The band took the 'know all' Noel option and spent the next 18 months gestating in private, playing a few pub gigs to universal disinterest. "We were yer typical indie saddos," remembers Noel. Still, they stuck to the plan that Noel, via his 'insider' experiences, had worked out. They didn't send demos out; they didn't play every pissbarrel venue on the pub circuit; they kicked back until they knew they had a devastating set together. "We knew it would happen for us sooner or later," he says.

Via a Manchester band they were friendly with, Oasis blagged themselves onto the bill of a show that Creation Records' boss Alan McGee was attending in Glasgow. He witnessed the first song in their impromptu four-song set and, before the end, was hopping about on stage brandishing a cheque book, signing them the next day to a six-album deal.

HEATHEN CHEMISTRY

Another year passes... the band are now very good, demos do the rounds and word spreads, as does their reputation as hellraisers. The inkies run stories about the squabbling love-hate sibling thing that's at the heart of the Gallaghers' antagonistic partnership, even though it's nothing we haven't seen before: Townshend and Daltrey, Jagger and Richards, Ray and Dave Davies, Morrissey and Marr.

"I write for Liam the way Townshend wrote for Daltrey," insists Noel. "Our kid's cocky and brash, but there's some stuff he just couldn't write 'cos it's not in him. Our kid went to the Job Centre and asked if they had any vacancies for a pop star, so they gave him the forms and made him sit the test – but he got every question wrong and that's what makes him a genius frontman. He hasn't any fuckin' idea, but he's a natural, a one-off. It's a classic case of hating the one you love – he wishes he was



"I HAD A TALENT FOR TAKING GUITARS APART AND PUTTING 'EM BACK TOGETHER. I GOT TO SEE THE WORLD AND GOT PAID £400 A WEEK"

Noel with his faithful touring companion, a 1960s ES-355, at Bellahouston Park in Glasgow in 2016

In the US in 1994 playing a Black Les Paul Custom lent to him by Johnny Marr

me 'cos I can write songs, and I wish I was as brash and cocky as him and I'm not. There you have it. We can't ever say these things, so we fight about it instead."

The fact that Liam has a dismissive attitude to what the guitarist feels is his real skill also fuels their mutual angst. "Interviewers ask Liam about the music all the time and I have to tell him to shut up, because he hasn't a clue where it comes from. He might think he knows, but he did not have to sit up until 7am in the morning and write the fuckers. You get more and more drunk, you smoke more and more fags, then the sun comes up and you've got it – that's satisfaction.

"I don't want to get all poncey about it, but there's a lot of pain involved in writing songs and for some 22-year-old to flippantly pass it off in an interview just pisses me off. He can't write songs... he can't even write his own name."

Tales of squabbling, hooliganism, hotel trashing, drug-taking and stealing golf carts from Gleneagles Country Club are now part of the Oasis legend. It's a side of the band Noel doesn't deny exists, but he personally has no time for. "I can do without all this 'rock 'n' roll hooligan' bollocks. I've been through it all before. It's boring and I'd rather write a good song than do a hotel room. Our Liam wants to be remembered like Sid Vicious and all I want is my name to appear in 20 years' time in an *NME* list of the 20 Greatest Songwriters Ever... then I'll die happy."

GOING SUPERSONIC

With the dawn of 1994, the band embarked on a series of packed London showcases and a national tour which had everyone who saw them fumbling for adjectives. Then came their first real test, the debut single, *Supersonic*. "We'd have looked like mouthy c***s if we hadn't made the charts, but it did and it was a great record," says Noel recalling the relief of their first hit.

So they play *Top Of The Pops* in a *Ready Steady Go!* manner and follow it up by launching a 12-bar called *Shakermaker* into the charts. Their first trip to the US is a resounding success; the New York Times commenting: "Every song sounds like a bona-fide classic" – and this is before anything by Oasis has even been released Stateside. The band's debut album, *Definitely Maybe* (produced by themselves, Owen Morris and Mark Coyle, recorded, re-recorded and

recorded again until they felt they'd managed to get as close to their live sound as they could), arrives this month – and we're more or less up to date.

SCORING ON YOUR DEBUT

Definitely Maybe stands as one of those great but all-too-rare debut pop albums. Almost perfection: something like listening to the Pistols playing the Lennon and McCartney songbook while The Smiths and The Stone Roses are hovering about in the background. Oasis may never make another record as good as this, but that is now irrelevant.

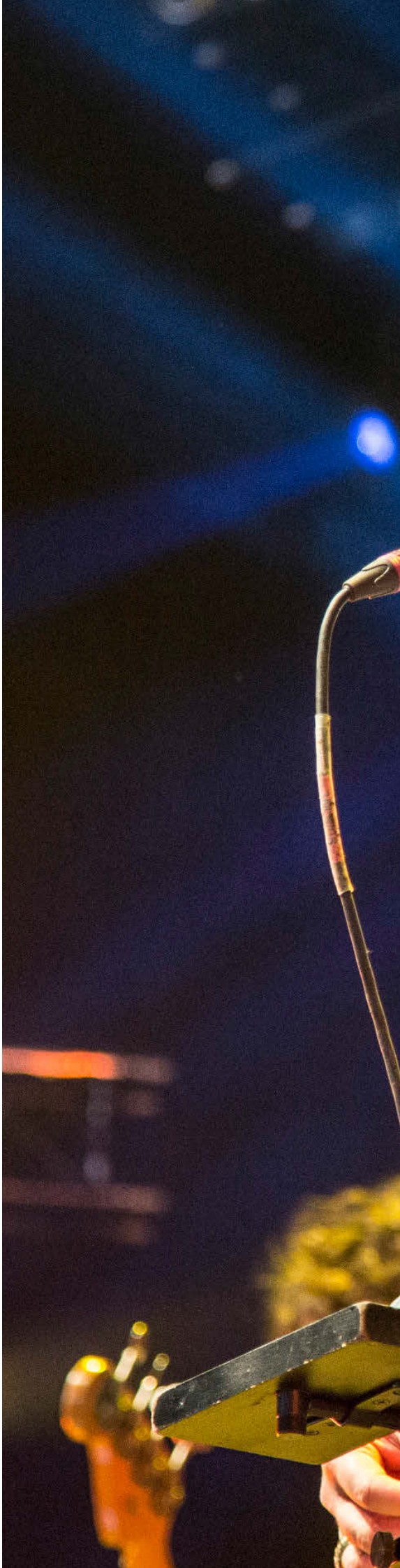
Like The New York Dolls' and Television's debuts, the mere arrival of *Definitely Maybe* has caused a major rethink on planet pop. "I know it's a great record," says Noel, characteristically enthusiastic. "We worked hard. But it's only the beginning – I've got another six songs as good as *Supersonic* and that's one of the great pop singles of our age. Singles make great bands, not albums. When you think The Smiths put out *How Soon Is Now?*, *The Draize Train* and *Jeane* as B-sides to singles, then you really begin to notice the difference between the great bands and the average ones. Our album is 10 great pop singles... and a bit of a sloppy ballad for balance."

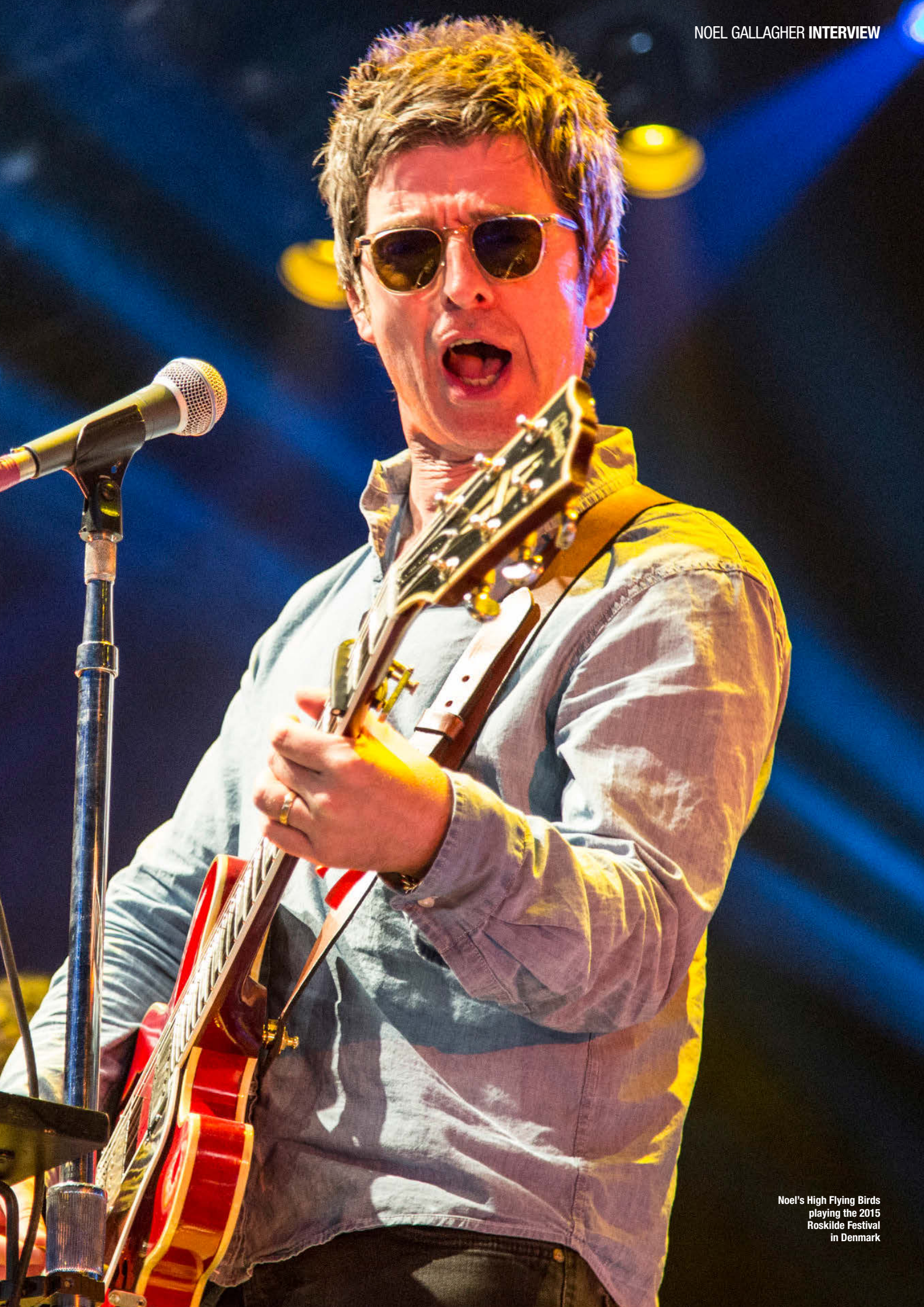
> "OUR ALBUM IS 10 GREAT POP SINGLES AND A BIT OF A SLOPPY BALLAD FOR BALANCE"

The songs themselves pilfer from rock's great treasure chest of past masters with unabashed abandon. A case of 'rip it off and start again'. "Guitars have six strings, 12 frets, 36 basic chords – it's all been done before. If you can't accept that, then music comes to an end and you might as well fuck off and play *Sonic The Hedgehog*. Go for the obvious, go for the easy melody. *Hey Jude* is McCartney's cheap shot; *Let It Be* is a cheap shot... but both are great songs."

ON THE SHOULDER OF GIANTS

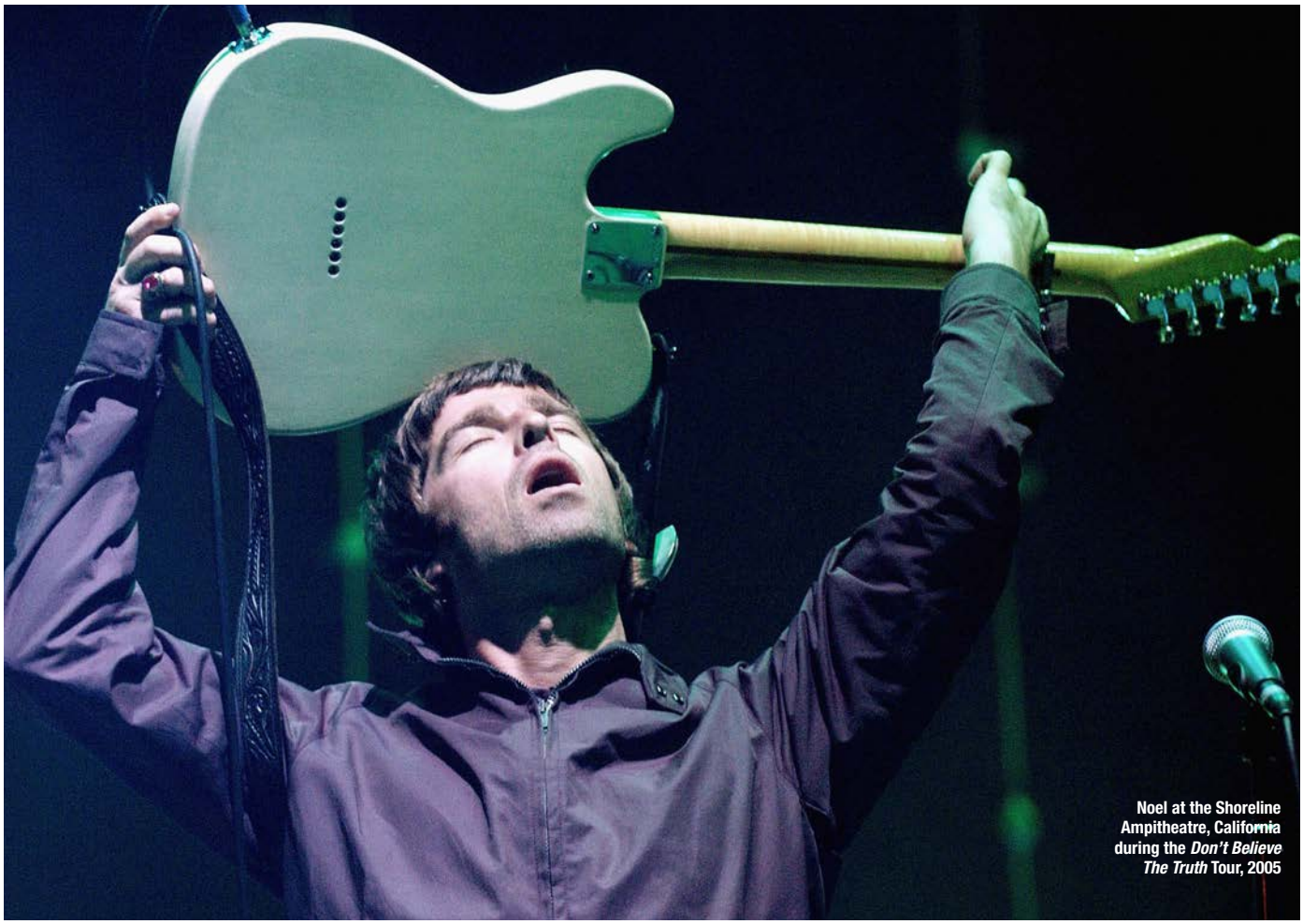
This neat theory is borne out by almost every track Oasis play, from the singles *Supersonic* and *Shakermaker* (with its 12-bar predictability and blatant borrowing of The





Noel's High Flying Birds playing the 2015 Roskilde Festival in Denmark

Backstage at the Heineken Music Hall in 2009 in Amsterdam on the band's final tour, supporting the *Dig Out Your Soul* album



Noel at the Shoreline Ampitheatre, California during the *Don't Believe The Truth* Tour, 2005

New Seekers' *I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing*) to *Cigarettes And Alcohol* and *Slide Away* from the album – the latter sees Noel exorcising his Neil Young fixation, coming on like an unadulterated but sophisticated trip into the realms of *Cortez The Killer*. "It's never really a rip off, more of a sampling of the mood," he adds defensively.

Some more pedantic music critics have jabbed their fingers at Oasis' magpie approach, commenting how *Cigarettes And Alcohol* is just T. Rex's *Get It On*. Noel rises to the challenge, commenting that behind every great band in history, there's been a songwriter with tea-leaf tendencies. "To those people, I say: 'You've got us sussed, mate. It's T. Rex alright, but it's the best song Marc Bolan never wrote!'. Bolan was ripping off Howlin' Wolf when he did *Get It On* anyway and even if he had written *Cigarettes And Alcohol*, it would have had lyrics about pixies and shit, so count yourself lucky."

Despite these easy comparisons, ultimately, Oasis transcend them all. They're not the next Beatles, nor the next Pistols nor even the next Stone Roses... they're the first Oasis. Noel puts it in context, making the point that while he has influences, he doesn't reserve any sacred reverence for his heroes.

"Being influenced by people is all well and good, but you've got to want to outdo 'em. I want to outdo The Beatles. I don't have too many gods, 'cos otherwise, you'd get fuck all done and besides, it's all just building on the past, that's how you get to the future. The Beatles write *Helter Skelter*, The Stooges and the MC5 hear that and do *I Wanna Be Your Dog* and *Sister Anne*, the Pistols hear that and you get punk, then come The Smiths, the Roses and now us."

> **"I LIVE IN MY OWN WORLD – AND IN THAT WORLD, THE ONLY THING THAT REALLY MATTERS IS MUSIC"**

FAMILIAR TO MILLIONS

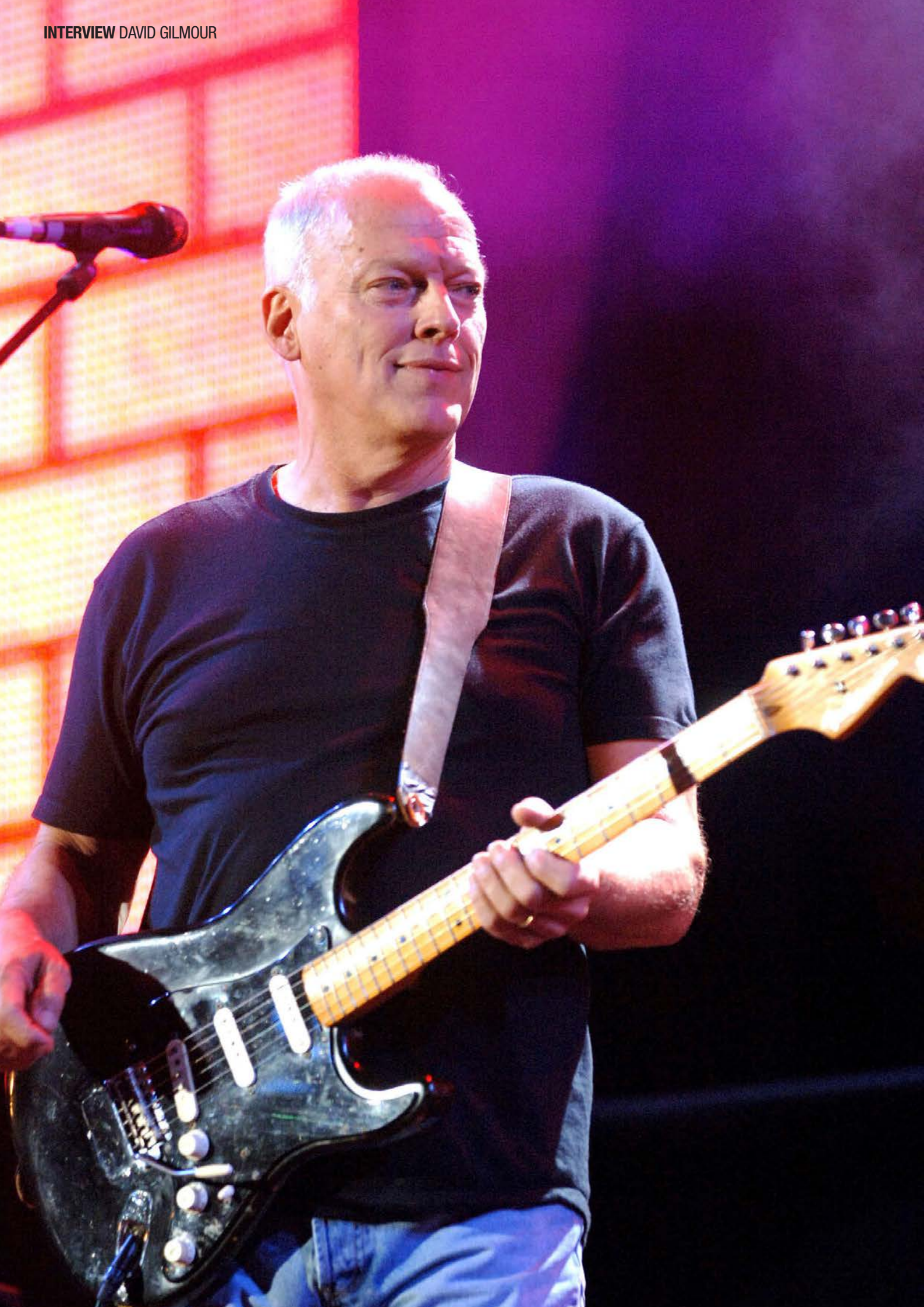
A conveniently self-reverential encapsulation of pop history that could well be true. At any rate, it puts The Beatles firmly at the top of the pile as grandpappies of the Oasis sound. For this band, The Beatles are, simply put, the essence, the thing they aspire to. "You can't knock The Beatles. Sonic Youth have been trying to do *Helter Skelter* for years and The Beatles did it 25 years ago!"

Noel says his proudest moment, aside from linking up with Crazy Horse, came when the band played a pub gig and something brought the whole Beatles/Oasis connection home. "This 50-year-old bloke was stood at the back with his wife. He had a great big droopy 'tache and was supping a pint. They turn up backstage and this bloke says: 'I lived to hear *I Am The Walrus* live, I can die happy now'."

So there you have it: Oasis, the best new thing in guitar pop and considerably more likely to make old men happy than The Bootleg Beatles. They fight, they take drugs, they're sometimes silly hooligans with a penchant for hotel demolition, but behind all the chemically fuelled foolery is a band hopelessly in love with music, songs and the pop ethic.

"I'm a loner," concludes Noel. "I live in my own world and in that world, the only thing that really matters is music. If the devil popped up tomorrow and said it's a straight choice between music and relationships – be it mum, girlfriend, or even Liam – I'd sign on the dotted line."

Every generation kicks a bona-fide hero or two up the pop charts – a group who come to embody not just pop fad-ism but the spirit and aspirations of a particular zeitgeist. As The Stone Roses were to the end of the 80s, Oasis will be to the mid 90s. The band embody the notion that we've reached the point where the spirit of 60s psychedelic mod pop can cohabit with the spirit of punk in perfect harmony. Perhaps The New Seekers were right after all...



DAVID GILMOUR

AFTER A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY FOLLOWING PINK FLOYD'S APPEARANCE AT THE LIVE 8 CONCERT – INCLUDING A SOLO LP, A STUNNING SERIES OF CONCERTS, THE *LIVE IN GDANSK* AND *REMEMBER THAT NIGHT* DVDS – DAVID GILMOUR TAKES STOCK OF FOUR YEARS OF WORK IN THIS JANUARY 2009 INTERVIEW…

Words EDWIN AMMERLAAN

A true legend he may be, but Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour is a modest, quiet Englishman who's rarely in the mood for the kind of navel-gazing required when the press come a-calling. Past glories mean little to him: this is one musician who prefers to stand behind his Black Strat and let his music do the talking. Our interview took place a short while before Pink Floyd keyboard player Richard Wright's sad passing. Even before this, however, the odds were heavily against a Pink Floyd reunion. Their Live 8 appearance in 2005, complete with Roger Waters, fuelled much hope and rumours flew around about the stupendous sums of money supposedly being offered to the band to tour.

However, Gilmour has always been lukewarm, at best, regarding the whole idea of waltzing down memory lane – although, in June 2008, he did make a glorious contribution to an *Atom Heart Mother* live spectacular that included a complete rendition of the album (despite the fact that he once described parts of that 1970 album as "absolute crap").

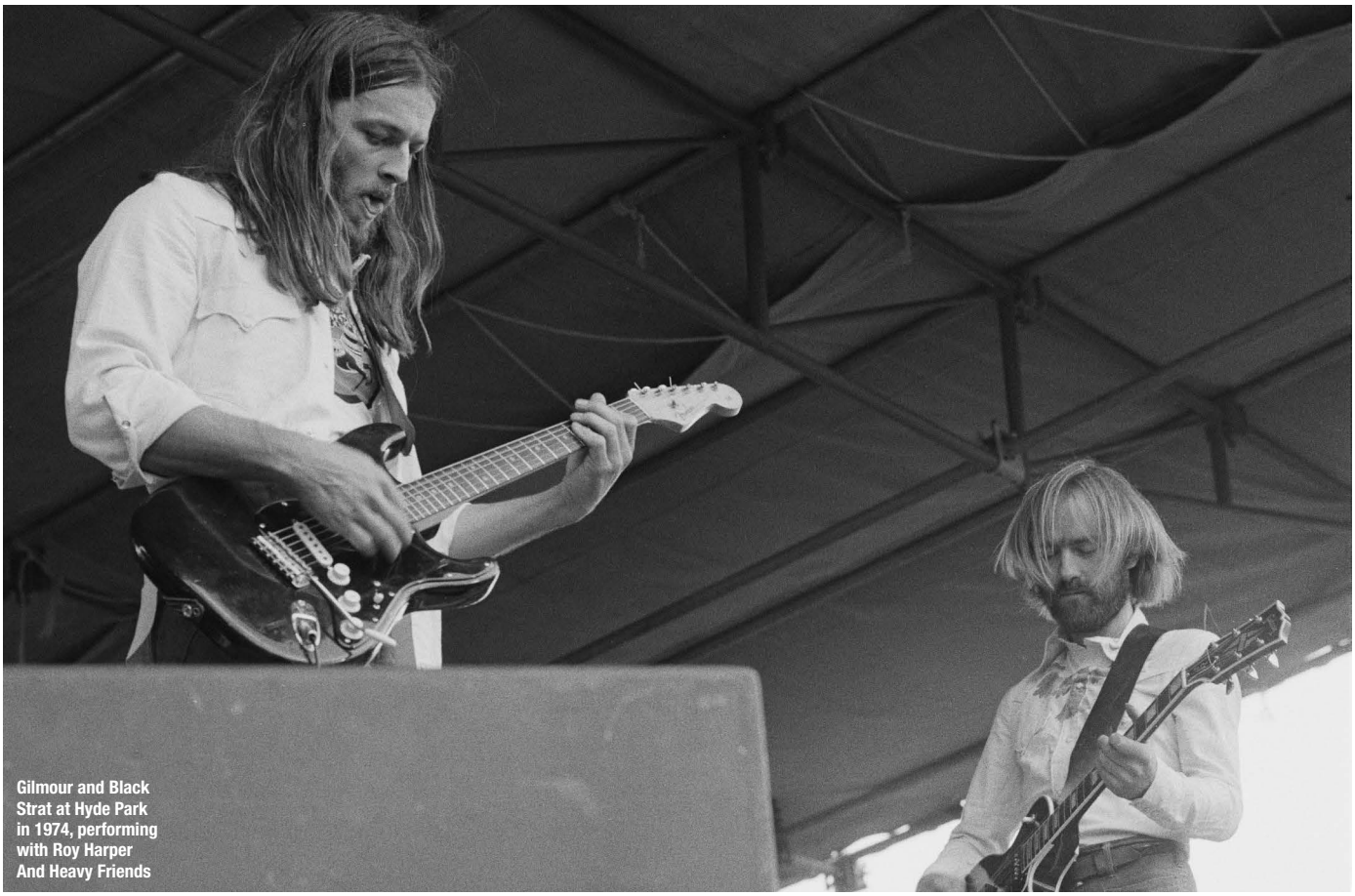
Gilmour's main focus for the past few years has been his solo work, including the chart-topping album *On An Island*, as well as the recently released *Live In Gdańsk*, documenting the last concert of the *On An Island* tour, backed by the Polish Baltic Philharmonic Orchestra. As well as being a Gilmour tour de force, the show at the shipyard celebrated Poland's 1980 Solidarity political revolution (the DVD also features a meeting between Gilmour and Solidarity union leader Lech Walęsa). And it's the subject of that Gdańsk concert that kicks off proceedings as, with a fine cup of tea within reach, Gilmour gets himself comfortable aboard his Astoria houseboat/recording studio moored on a tranquil stretch of the River Thames…

Right at the beginning of the *Live In Gdańsk* documentary, you say: "This is the memorial to the 16 men who were shot," and then… nothing. How did you find a balance between the political and the personal?

"I wasn't really trying to make a political message out of any of this stuff. I think my personal message comes out best when I'm playing my guitar and singing. I feel funny when you take part in something like that. It's got nothing to do with me. I was thrilled to be there. They invited me to come and play in Gdańsk and go to the memorial. I have a great deal of respect for it all, but it's not really my story. I wasn't one of the people that it made a huge difference to, and I certainly don't want to jump on someone else's bandwagon for gain."

Maybe that's why the meeting with Lech Walęsa seemed to be a bit on the uncomfortable side?

"They were celebrating and I was asked to be a part of that celebration, which I was happy and honoured to do. The world is still



Gilmour and Black Strat at Hyde Park in 1974, performing with Roy Harper And Heavy Friends

changing. It was very nice and thrilling to meet this man who was so moved and angry by the lack of freedom. He could voice it so well and he could get all these people moving. He forced changes against the will of the entire Soviet Eastern Bloc. What can I say to a man who has changed the world? 'Congratulations, you done good, boy'? I'm out of my depth, to be honest."

Did political implications ever stop you from playing somewhere?
"Well, we never played in South Africa when it was a racially segregated country. It has to be said that most of the places that would be involved in that sort of discussion were so far away and on their own that they wouldn't be financially viable. I've never been keen on wasting a lot of money to go somewhere to make some political point."

Have you ever used your status as a famous artist for political reasons?
"There are certain charitable political things. I'm quite happy to state my political preferences and biases."

But you're no Bono...
"No, I'm not gifted with that conviction that one thing is right and another thing is completely wrong. I don't have the gift that Geldof and Bono seem to have. If they do any good, all power to them. I have no objection to people stating their politics within their music, and they can do that as subtly or as unsubtly as they want. Sometimes, when it's not so subtle, it loses its effect and its power. But we are at liberty to do whatever the fuck we want with the gift that we are given."

You've never wanted to surround yourself with the mystique of being a rock star...
"I just walk through life my way. And 'my way' is to be naturally fairly private – but not ridiculously so. I want to be able to be a part of the real world. I want to be able to go to the supermarket and buy my food and do all the sort of things that any other person would do. There comes a point within stardom where that starts to become very difficult, but I figure if you just keep doing it, you'll be alright and it won't matter very much. But surely, for Paul McCartney, it will be much harder than it is for me. As a well-known musician, being part of many people's ordinary lives can be a humbling experience as well. It's a fine line that one walks. Obviously, I would like to be seen as being marvellously talented! At the same time, I want to appear to be one of the so-called 'people'. I'm in a rarified atmosphere, but I try to keep that down as far as I can."

Is this down-to-earth approach down to your own particular upbringing?

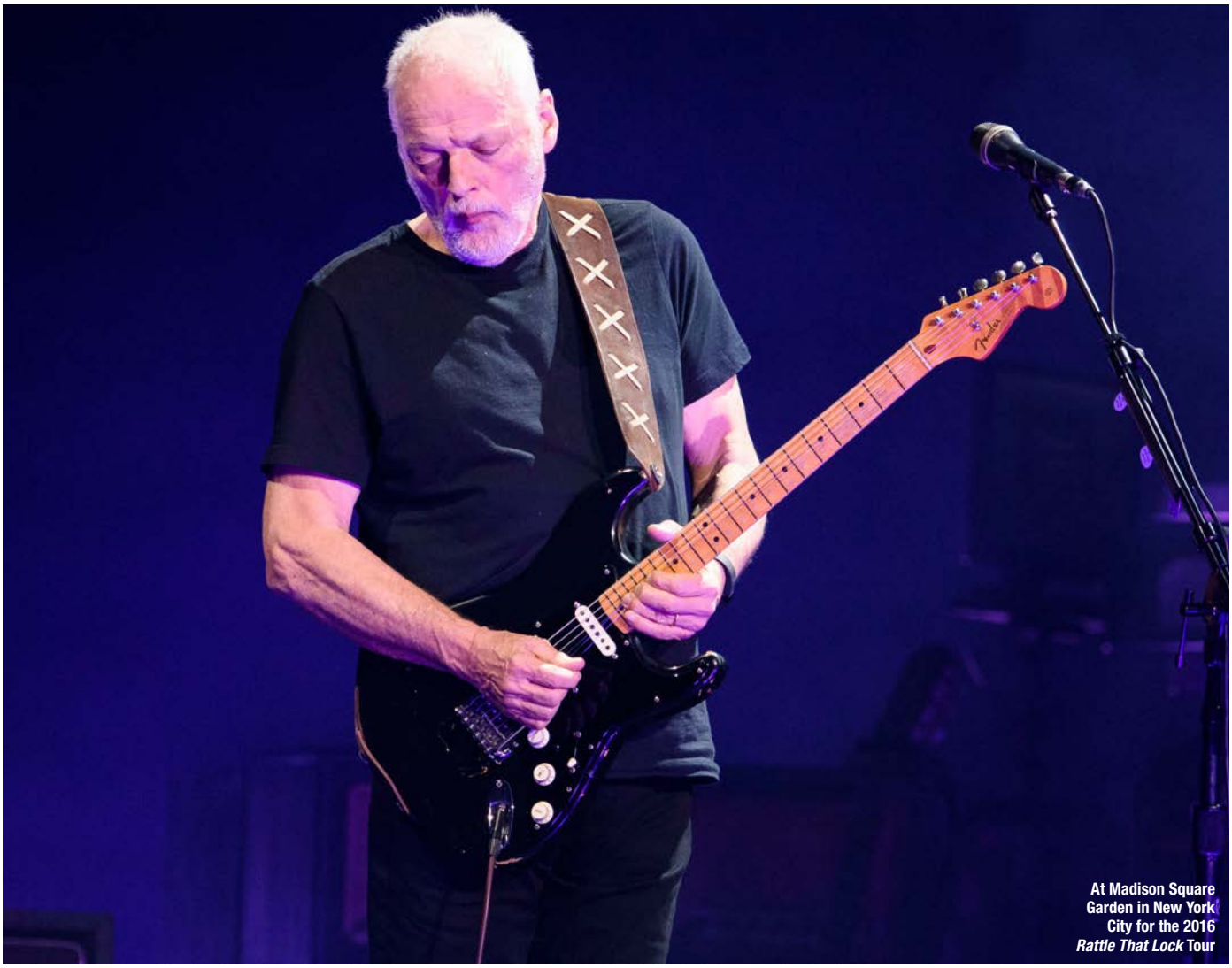
"THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN YOU FIND A PIECE OF MUSIC THAT COMES OUT OF THE AIR"

"Maybe, yeah. I come from a family who took left-leaning newspapers and were in education. My parents both met at Cambridge University. Both were interested in art. I'm sure my upbringing had some influence on me. I look more like my father. He was more closed down than I am; I can see I have the possibility be a little closed-in, as well. Seeing him to be like that helped me be less like that."

Can anything still boost your ego?
"The best thing for one's ego is doing a great show and having the audience clapping and cheering at the end. There's more that I want to do, but there's no specific target that I can pin down. I still think I've got more to prove. One's security in all these things is never absolute. I want people to listen to the music that I make. I want them to get a tenth of the pleasure I've had out of making it and putting it all together. There are moments when you make a record, you come across notes or find a piece of music that comes out of the air, and you get it to sound really nice in the studio and you've done everything right, and you go and think: 'That's so fucking brilliant!' And you'll say 'thank you' to whatever higher being has guided it towards you. I want to feel that the public, the other people in this world who are capable of feeling those same emotions, would get a bit of that emotion by listening to the music that I make."

And the other way around, is there still any music that brings tears to your eyes?
"Not very much these days. Only my own, recently. But then, I don't listen to an awful lot of music any more. Life is too busy. When I was a teenager and in my 20s, I had very

Gilmour playing the Vredenburg venue in Utrecht, in 1984



At Madison Square Garden in New York City for the 2016 *Rattle That Lock* Tour

little to do except listen to music. My children are obsessed with music in the way I was when I was that age. Sometimes, I think I'm jaded, that nothing is going to turn me on any more... and then I go and see Leonard Cohen in London and realise, no, I'm still capable of being moved.

"But most of the time, it just happens when I'm listening to my own stuff. When I'm at home, listening with [wife] Polly to it on a good speaker system. Listening to *The Blue* from my last album, for example; although I don't want to brag, I really have moments thinking: 'That's just brilliant!'. I wish I could make a record where every single moment of every single song did that to me."

There's a theory among Prince fans that the way he plays the guitar solo in *Purple Rain* will show whether or not it's going to be a special night. Can people can get similar indicators from your performances?

"Yes. For me, when I'm feeling my most inspired on stage, I'll go a long way away from the solo on the record. If I'm not feeling inspired, I'll go safer and safer and closer to the way I played it on record. If you hear me play a solo that's the same as the record, I'm not feeling that inspired."

> "WHEN I'M FEELING MY MOST INSPIRED ON STAGE, I'LL GO A LONG WAY AWAY FROM THE SOLO ON THE RECORD"

What happens at moments like that? Does your mind wander off?

"I'm very professional. I try to keep my mind on what I'm doing. It's actually quite easy not to do that, to be playing a song and to be thinking about washing the car, but I've trained myself to try and get back in focus. Those people haven't paid all that money for me to be thinking about tomorrow's groceries."

The solo in *Comfortably Numb* is regarded as one of your best, but on the live album, the solos in *Castellorizon* and *The Blue* are easily up there with your finest...

"Maybe I've done the solo in *Comfortably Numb* too many times. It's hard not to feel jaded when you play that solo. Still, you're always trying to be brave, to break out and do something different with it."

Most people think of you as a progressive-rock hero, but there's always been a blues aspect to your guitar playing as well...

"Well, I had a lot of blues records when I was young. Blues is a distinct and large part of my influence, yes, but all sorts of other things are as well. My last album, *On An Island*, is a blues album – my sort of blues. The blues is really black American folk. I'm a poor white boy from England. Well, not so poor... but at least trying to express myself the best way I can. And that's what the blues is about. I don't want to restrict myself to a 12-bar form or anything like that."

Finally, do you have any plans to make a new solo album?

"It's not in the system... yet. These projects come into the public's consciousness for a very limited time. The album came out in March 2006; six months later, I did the last concert in Gdańsk, and then it's a wrap. Then I disappear for a while, the DVD comes out, but in general, it was four years of solid work."

DAVID GILMOUR **INTERVIEW**

Pink Floyd in Rotterdam during their 1977 In The Flesh Tour in support of the *Animals* album

PETER GREEN

With the release of a new DVD about his life, Peter Green – the man who no less a light than BB King famously described as the best blues guitarist in the world – breaks his silence to reminisce with us about his own personal hard road, in this interview from September 2007

Words JULIAN PIPER

"I've only recently begun to understand what blues is really all about. I used to think that it was all about cotton fields and country blues – I was always fluffing around with stuff that I didn't really understand. I couldn't latch onto it all at first."

Peter Green is sitting quietly in the corner of a hotel bar in the shadows of Tower Bridge. If you've ever met Peter over the last decade, then hearing him talking today, in 2007 – sharing anecdotes and confidently reminiscing about his musical life – you won't be able to avoid help noticing a sharp contrast between this relaxed and lucid character and the noticeably introverted man you'd have encountered just over a decade ago at the time of his re-emergence in 1996 with the Splinter Group. Slightly portly and with only a frizz of white curls that hint at his long-haired glory days, Peter in person has the air of a kindly, benevolent uncle.

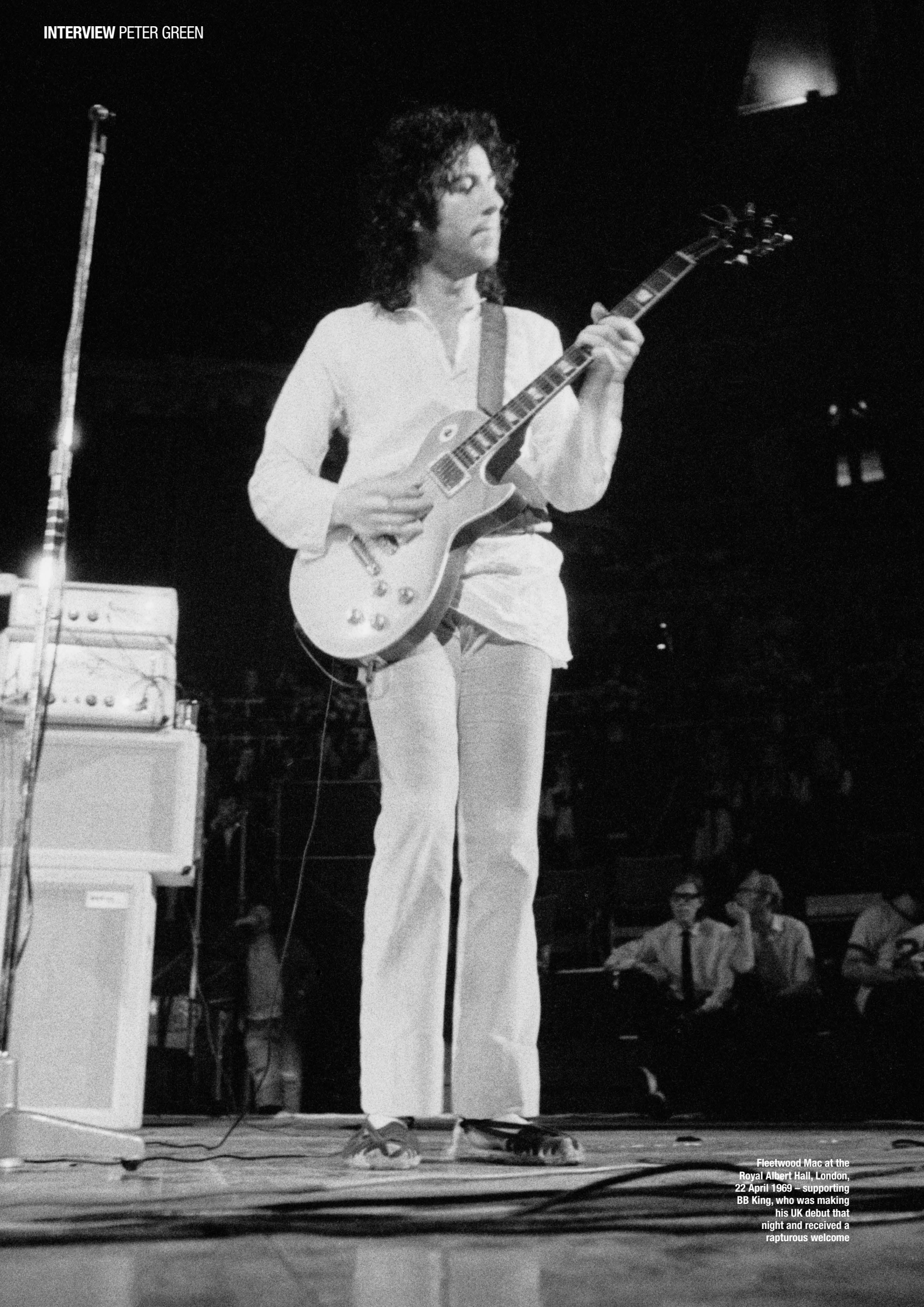
It's hard to reconcile this unassuming presence with the legendary guitarist who led such an astonishing career with the band Fleetwood Mac. Just two years after forming in the summer of 1967, the band was managing to shift more records than The Beatles and The Rolling Stones combined. Equally remarkable was the way that a hard-nosed blues outfit transformed into Fleetwood Mac – the world-straddling pop stars, producing hit singles like *Albatross*, *Oh Well* and *Black Magic Woman*. And then, for Peter Green, it all went wrong.

BLACK MAGIC

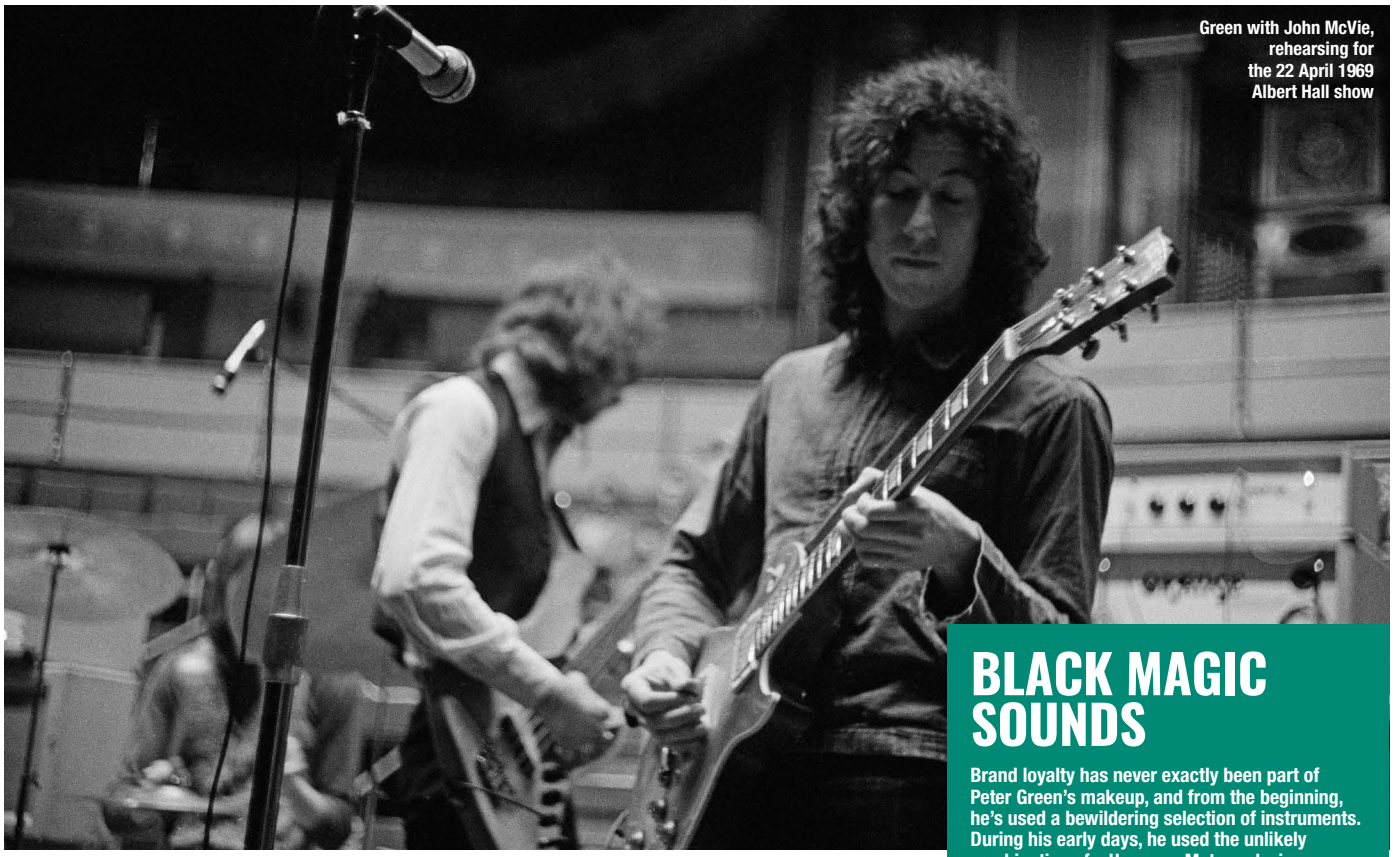
Maybe it's the passage of time – after all, it's been almost 40 years – but now the guitarist has no problem in reflecting on his darkest days. "I know that after I had taken LSD, I was out of communiqué for a long time," he begins. "But it wasn't hard to be the way I was... I was ready to do it. I was worried about what I felt was this privileged position I had as a musician, and I didn't like what was expected of me. If people asked me to play them something, I'd just say: 'No'. They'd say: 'Get your hair cut', or: 'Cut your fingernails', and I'd just refuse. I suppose I was like a beatnik – but I liked the way I was. I liked having my fingernails long, even if I couldn't play guitar; I didn't need to play. I didn't want to even think of myself as a musician."

It's a period laid bare in the new DVD [*The Peter Green Story – Man Of The World*], which provides a fascinating portrayal of Peter's career, even if there is at times a certain *Spinal Tap* quality to some of the episodes – such as when Peter's ex-girlfriend Sandra Elsdon reveals her night terrors about the guitarist's 'magic stick' referred to in *Black Magic Woman*.

John McVie, Jeremy Spencer and Mick Fleetwood also pop up to share their memories



Fleetwood Mac at the Royal Albert Hall, London, 22 April 1969 – supporting BB King, who was making his UK debut that night and received a rapturous welcome



Green with John McVie, rehearsing for the 22 April 1969 Albert Hall show

of the guitarist at his best and worst points. Was it painful for Green to be reminded of some of these things? "No, I quite liked the DVD," Green assures us. "Maybe I would have liked to have heard some more music and not hear so much talking! But by end, I felt quite filled in about a lot of things that I never understood at the time."

START OF THE GAME

Peter Green's initial guitar inspiration was his older brother Len, the first member of the Green family to get a guitar. For Peter, Len's informal lessons were a welcome escape from his day job as an apprentice to a butcher in Putney. "He taught me a bit, but I was never any good at chords," Green says. "I always preferred to play the tune. I used to like Hank Marvin's finer work, and my brother Michael and I learnt to play *Apache* – but he'd play the chords while I always picked out the tune.

"I didn't really want to play blues at first, but I used to go and listen to The Yardbirds at places like the Crawdaddy Club and the Marquee Club in Wardour Street, which made me want to give up the bass, and try and get that Eric Clapton style on guitar. I used to love watching Paul Samwell-Smith, The Yardbirds' bass player; he interested me because he looked a bit like a university teacher and always used to do this doubling-up thing at the end of numbers to bring them up to a climax. I was intrigued by everything about them. They seemed to attract a college crowd; sometimes they were a bit ragged, but it was a fabulous show.

"I'd seen the Stones in Richmond, but The Yardbirds were very different; they were all very clean, their guitars were new and their hair looked good, whereas The Rolling Stones always seemed to be dirty and dusty. Their music wasn't that clever technically, I suppose, but for me, it was a new high, a climactic thing that really seemed to be going somewhere."

At the time, Peter owned a Harmony Meteor semi-acoustic that had been given to him by the guitarist in one of his early bands. "It was a beautiful guitar," he remembers fondly. At one point, he'd actually converted the Harmony into a four-string bass but, inspired by Clapton's playing, he once again replaced the nut and bridge to return the guitar to six-string form. Clapton was only 18 months older than Green, but musically and professionally, was already on another level. Legend has it that Peter would regularly grab the obliging Eric Clapton after Yardbirds gigs and absorb some playing tips.

Equipped with his trusty Harmony, Peter then joined Peter B's Looners, an instrumental outfit led by organist Peter Bardens, and soon he was playing legendary mod hangouts like the Flamingo Club in Wardour Street and The

"MY BROTHER TAUGHT ME A BIT: I WAS NEVER ANY GOOD AT CHORDS. I ALWAYS PREFERRED TO PLAY THE TUNE"

BLACK MAGIC SOUNDS

Brand loyalty has never exactly been part of Peter Green's makeup, and from the beginning, he's used a bewildering selection of instruments. During his early days, he used the unlikely combination of a Harmony Meteor playing through a 50-watt Vox Foundation bass amp with a whopping 18-inch speaker, which he remembers buying from an Earl's Court radio shop. Peter employed the Harmony throughout his first short stint with John Mayall, only changing to the Sunburst 1959 Les Paul Standard after Clapton eventually left The Bluesbreakers for good in 1966.

The promo footage filmed for *I Need Your Love So Bad* shows Peter and Jeremy Spencer both using Sunburst Fender Strats. "That was Jeremy's idea," Green recalls. "He thought that we should get these Sunburst Strats with maple necks. He bought them from a pawn shop in the States. I found it difficult switching, though. I think I only used mine for a month or so before I went back to playing the Gibson."

In 1968, the band was one of the first high-profile acts to use the new Orange amps, but Green was never happy with the sound, and swapped to a Fender Bandmaster played through two Fender cabs, a 2x10 and a 1x12. For the classical segment of *Oh Well*, Peter used a Spanish-built Ramírez flamenco guitar. He's currently trying to acquire a similar instrument. In subsequent years, he played many guitars, including a Fender Jaguar, a Framus Nashville, a black Aria Les Paul-style electric, a rosewood-'board Stratocaster and a yellow Ibanez. During his stint with the Splinter Group, he mainly played a black semi-acoustic Gibson Howard Roberts model and a selection of Fender Strats.

Green still has a fair collection of instruments stashed in a lock-up, including an Ozark thin-body resonator fitted with a lipstick pickup; a much-played green Tanglewood Nashville thinline semi; a mid-70s single-pickup Iceman-type Ibanez Artist; a 50s Cherry Epiphone Century; a fine Martin 000; a Kay Jimmy Reed; a blue Cort jazz guitar; a violin-bass copy; a maple classical guitar and a '52-style Squier Tele. His current favourite, however, is a natural wood-finish custom electric made for him by luthier Guy Harrison.

"I like to have a guitar with just one pickup," Green adds. "That way, you can try and keep the real connection between the man and the instrument. It's something which tends to get lost, the more electrics there are."

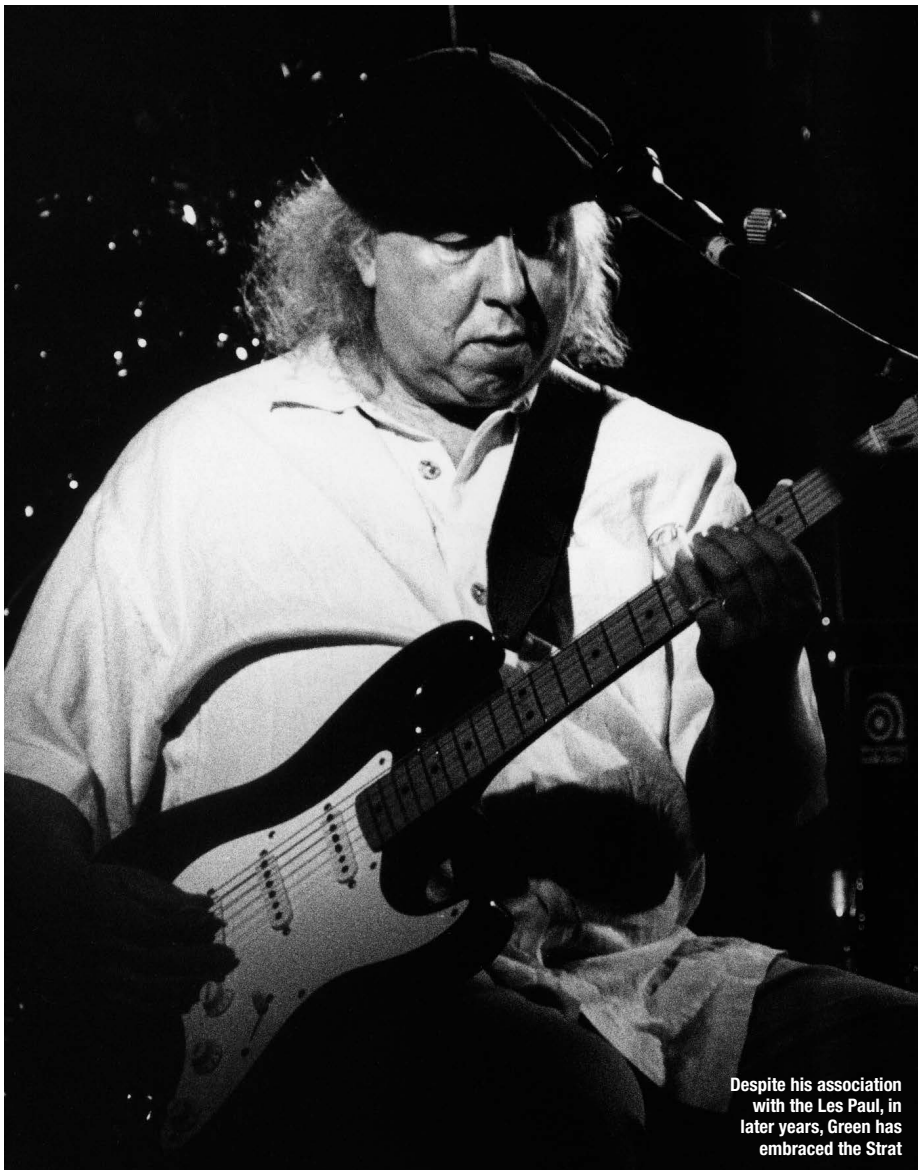
Ram Jam Club in Brixton. Without doubt, the experience was valuable – but more fatefully, the Looners' personnel also included a lanky drummer called Mick Fleetwood.

BREAKING INTO THE BLUES

In March 1965, The Yardbirds released *For Your Love*. Disheartened by the band's sudden commercialism, Eric Clapton abruptly left to play with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. Some 40 years on, Peter Green is understandably hazy about the precise sequence of events, but what is certain is that, along with many others inspired by Clapton's virtuoso playing, he also rapidly became a Bluesbreakers fan. Crucially for Green, Clapton wouldn't stick long with The Bluesbreakers, either.

"I still didn't ever make any conscious decision to play blues guitar, but I'd seen Eric Clapton playing with John Mayall so much," Green recalls. "Peter B's Looners used to support John Mayall at the Flamingo Club, and when I found out Eric was going to Greece, I went along to the Zodiac Club in Putney where I lived to try and get an audition. They had someone called Jeff Kribbett playing guitar, and although I didn't necessarily think that I could do a better job than him, I just wanted to have a go! He was doing these little blues phrases, like the riff on *My Babe*, and I thought: 'I can't do that' – but I noticed that he had big fingers, and that encouraged me."

"PETER COULD PLAY ALL THE LICKS ERIC PLAYED, BUT HE WAS GOING TO DO IT HIS WAY – AND HIS WAY WAS DIFFERENT"



Despite his association with the Les Paul, in later years, Green has embraced the Strat

Green eventually buttonholed John Mayall during the interval of a Bluesbreakers gig in August, 1965. Mayall remembers it well: "Peter got up from the audience and came up to me angling for the job, saying: 'Let me play. I'm better than he is'," he laughs. "He kept on doing this, each time becoming a bit more forceful, and because I was pretty much open to hearing anyone, I gave him a shot at it."

Green recalls the meeting differently. "John wouldn't let me play that day, but I was persistent, and eventually, I answered his advert in the *Melody Maker* saying that he wanted a guitarist of the Buddy Guy or Otis Rush calibre.

"I went to his house in Lee Green and we had a little audition. He said: "Well, you're the best I've heard since Eric," – which was good, because I was pushing the hell out of the strings trying to sound like him! I was a tremolo-arm kid – I'd never had a guitar with one, but I was trying to get that same bendy effect. I was quite nervous stepping into Eric's shoes. I worried that the band played too powerfully for me, or perhaps that John wouldn't like me. But I ended up doing two or three gigs with John – Newcastle, Sheffield Mojo and I think Klooks Kleek in Hampstead – before Eric came back."

GOD'S REPLACEMENT

Clapton's quick and unexpected return from his Greek odyssey understandably left Peter Green bitterly disappointed, but revenge would be sweet. In June 1966, frustrated by the limitations of The Bluesbreakers, the mercurial Clapton left to form Cream. To Green's delight, this time the tables were turned, and he found himself being courted by an eager John Mayall.

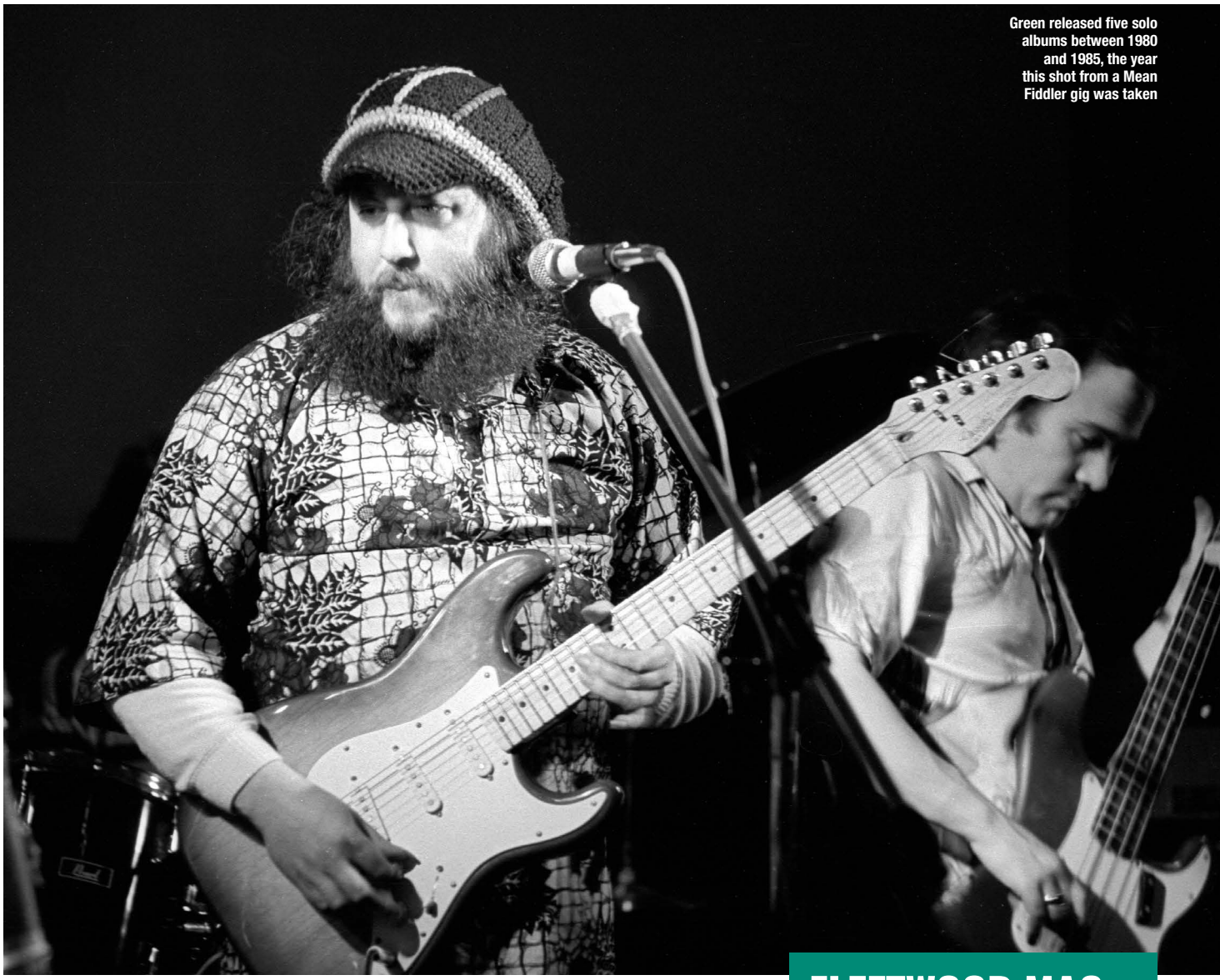
Determined to match Clapton's sound, Green bought a sunburst 1959 Gibson Les Paul and a 50-watt Marshall amplifier with a single 4x12 cabinet. His return to the band brought an immediate change in the Bluesbreakers' sound.

"The first time I used that guitar was when we were playing Klooks Kleek, and John said: "So that's your new weapon! You should do better with that," Peter laughs.

Towards the end of his tenure with John Mayall, Clapton had been increasingly stepping out of the traditional blues framework, with extended solos and the use of feedback. Green's approach was far more precise, and his carefully constructed solos harked back to the time when he'd first practised Shadows tunes with his brother. Initially, the Clapton fans were angry at this new boy on the block who appeared to be usurping the man they called 'God'. Soon, though, they began to accept that Clapton had a more-than-worthy successor.

Producer Mike Vernon echoed this sentiment when the band turned up at Decca's West Hampstead studios to begin recording the *A Hard Road* album. "I was expecting Eric," Vernon freely admits, "but from the moment that Peter plugged in, I never had any doubts that he was going to be as good as Clapton within the Bluesbreakers framework. I think John already knew that Peter could play all the licks that Eric played, but he was going to do it his way – and his way was different."

The Bluesbreakers' *A Hard Road* LP turned out to be every bit as accomplished as Clapton's Mayall debut. Peter Green



Green released five solo albums between 1980 and 1985, the year this shot from a Mean Fiddler gig was taken

supplied astonishingly eerie guitar on *The Supernatural* and some brilliantly biting licks on his reading of Freddie King's *The Stumble* and *Someday After A While (You'll Be Sorry)*, but even more surprising were his vocals on *You Don't Love Me*.

Unlike Clapton, whose singing on the previous Bluesbreakers album was diffident, Green sang with real authority and conviction. "I didn't ever want to be a frontman, though," Peter admits with a rueful smile. "All I wanted was to be a sideman, like Buddy Guy when he worked with Junior Wells. I didn't want to do vocals at all. It just came along by accident."

TOP OF THE WORLD

The reason that Peter Green decided to leave The Bluesbreakers in June 1967, only a year after joining, remains a mystery. It wasn't a personality clash: by this time, John McVie and Mick Fleetwood were both in the band and had become firm friends with Peter. He also got on well with John Mayall. But when Mayall thoughtfully awarded Green some studio time as a birthday present, he wheeled McVie and Fleetwood into the studio to record some tracks as a three piece.

It may be that Peter was irritated by use of a brass section on *A Hard Road*, a move that to some diehard blues traditionalists signalled a capitulation to the evil forces of jazz. Whatever the truth, by the time Peter Green left The Bluesbreakers, Mick Fleetwood had already been sacked.

"He came around to see me and we got Fleetwood Mac together," Fleetwood later reminisced. "We had no manager, so we did everything ourselves, got the van and equipment sorted out... Mike Vernon suggested we get Jeremy Spencer, who was playing in a Birmingham blues band called the Levi Set. We went up to see him, asked him to join and went straight into rehearsing for the Windsor National Jazz And Blues Festival with Bob Brunning on bass."

The band's first album, *Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac*, was released soon afterwards, and with the double whammy of Peter and Jeremy Spencer sharing the spotlight, the group quickly became a popular club act. But from the beginning, Jeremy Spencer's anarchic approach to slide guitar was always at odds with Peter's more structured approach to songwriting. "He couldn't play my tunes, so

FLEETWOOD MAC IN CHICAGO

In January 1969, with Mike Vernon on board, Fleetwood Mac visited the hallowed Chess Studios in Chicago. The Rolling Stones had visited the studio a few years earlier, a trip which resulted in the EP *Five By Five*, but Fleetwood Mac's intention was not just to rock up as a band and roll the tapes; they wanted to work with the resident Chicago bluesmen – some of whom, such as pianist Otis Spann, they already knew.

However, it would take more than the authentic setting and some famous names on board to satisfy the notoriously self-critical Peter Green. "I imagined that we'd be playing in a tiny basement studio or something, somewhere atmospheric," Green recalls today. "I always liked that when we recorded in Decca… we'd turn the lights down low – but even then, I still couldn't play as well as Eric Clapton!

"But in Chicago, we recorded in a gymnasium, a full-size American one. I couldn't even see the end of it. We got on well with the Chicago guys. There were no personality clashes. We had Otis Spann, Freddy Below, and S.P. Leary on drums as well.

"I wasn't pleased with it, though. I didn't touch it for years, and would only listen to it when there was nobody else around! *Homework* is a fabulous song, one of those songs like Elmore James's *Hand In Hand*, but we couldn't get anywhere near the Otis Rush sound."

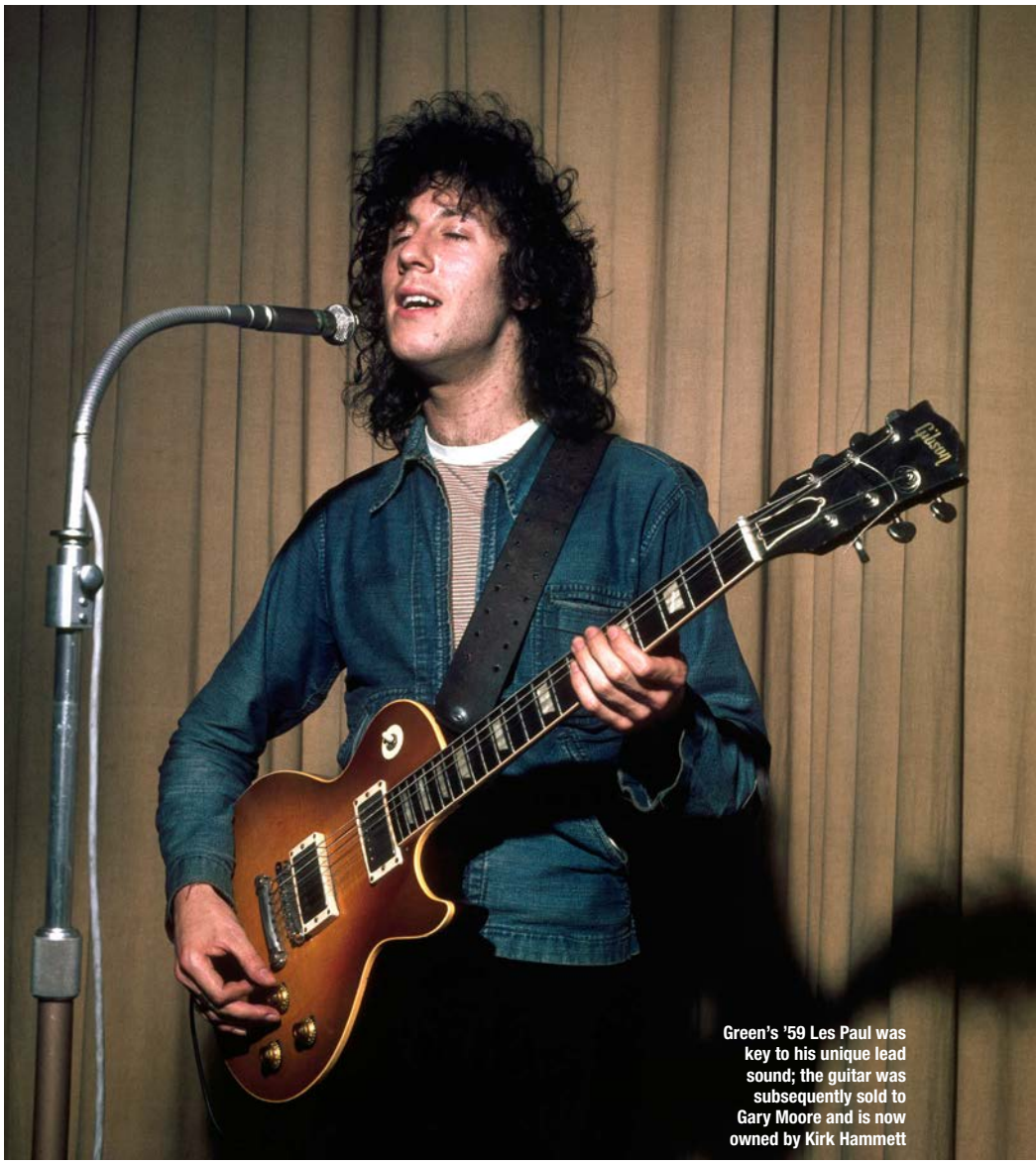
it was disheartening in a way," Peter admits. "When he joined, we used to share the singing half and half, but because he couldn't play on my songs, I only had bass and drums behind me. It was a bit empty.'"

The solution was not to dispense with Spencer's services – his onstage antics and sense of fun served as a perfect antidote to Peter's more studied approach – but to recruit a third guitarist. Danny Kirwan played for a London band that had supported Fleetwood Mac before.

"It was Mick's idea to get Danny in the band," says Green. "He was playing a Watkins Rapier in this band Boilerhouse, and just sounded so good. He was a terrific player.' Introducing a third guitarist wasn't a problem. "We never played all at once," Green explains. "Jeremy Spencer used to toddle off and leave us to it, which is why we had Danny Kirwan; Jeremy couldn't play my songs. At the beginning, he was supposed to play the piano – like Skip James, he thought – but he never did."

Black Magic Woman was released early in 1968 and nudged the bottom of the Top 50, giving the band their first taste of pop fame. However, no one – least of all Peter Green – was prepared for the runaway success of the band's next foray into the singles chart.

"I USED A HAWAIIAN THIRD STRING ON MY GIBSON LES PAUL TO AID VIBRATO: IT SOUNDS LIKE A HAWAIIAN GUITAR"



Green's '59 Les Paul was key to his unique lead sound; the guitar was subsequently sold to Gary Moore and is now owned by Kirk Hammett

In October that year, the band recorded *Albatross*, a wistful, laid-back instrumental that echoed Santo And Johnny's classic steel-guitar showcase, *Sleepwalk* and, once again, showed Peter's love of pure melody. "Jeremy didn't play on that record," notes Green. "I double-tracked the bass and did the slide guitar as well, playing a Stratocaster flat on my lap. When we did the video, Jeremy faked the slide part. In fact, I used a Hawaiian third string on my Gibson Les Paul as an aid for vibrato; it sounds like a Hawaiian guitar when the player's left his slide at home! I bought it because that was the only string the shop had that was the right gauge."

Post-*Albatross*, more hits – *Need Your Love So Bad*, *Man Of The World*, *Oh Well*, *The Green Manalishi* – quickly followed for the band. With such a populous line-up, not all of them, inevitably, were exactly as Peter would have preferred: "I never really intended *Oh Well* to have the first section," he complains. "I just wanted it to be the classical second side. I took the idea for the lyrics from that old blues song by Muddy Waters about "Oh well, if I was a catfish..."

FALLING AND RISING

Less than two years later, the original version of Fleetwood Mac would be over and Green, the band's undoubted leader, would spiral inexorably into a personal hell. His antipathy to touring and the trappings of success, combined with the psychic effects of too many acid trips, left him feeling paranoid and withdrawn. Though he had a couple of reunions with Fleetwood Mac in the early 70s and pulled himself together in the late 70s and early 80s with a handful of albums that showed glimmers of his talent, it wasn't until 1997 that he truly re-emerged, making a series of albums with the Splinter Group over the course of some seven years and releasing the all-acoustic *The Robert Johnson Songbook* in 1998. The latter, perhaps, revealed most strongly that Green's mind was once more at ease with playing blues – something that he had always struggled to justify.

Will we see Peter Green playing live again? It's impossible to say. Currently, he's spending time in Sweden, indulging his love for fishing on a lake near his girlfriend's house. "I feel good in myself but at the moment, I can't see myself going back to playing full time," he avers. Peter also seems to have attained a humorously philosophical attitude to the money and management problems that caused him so much torment in the past, though his words do seem to echo the let's-give-it-all-away attitude that pervaded his split from Fleetwood Mac.

"Once you have record sales, you do have to accept money – but my manager found a way out of it by not paying me," he chortles. "So maybe now all I need is a really good manager who won't give me any money!"

One final question before we go... Once, Peter Green said that, in his opinion, people can't really play the blues unless they'd actually experienced them. Does he still feel that way?

"Everyone gets the blues, whether they're rich or poor," he points out. "I've always known that to be born rich must give someone terrible blues – their whole life must feel as though it's a joke," he chuckles. "When I was a kid, I used to think that the blues was just all about the boring sides of life, like school and work. I used to get the blues about having to do my homework!"

Peter playing the *One Generation 4 Another* fundraiser show at the Royal Albert Hall, in 2004

GREEN ON BLUES

Ask Peter Green who some of his all-time-favourite musicians are, and who he's listening to at the moment, and you're in for a surprise. No big names, none of the three Kings, none of his peers – just a handful of fascinating names from off the beaten track.

"My favourite voice ever is this guy called Maxwell Street Jimmie, who was a busker on Maxwell Street in Chicago," Green says. "He played this demonic guitar and was a lovely, rough player. Some of his songs were tremendous, but he only made a few records.

"Then there's Hop Wilson, a slide guitar player from Houston who used a twin-neck lap steel. He recorded a couple of singles calling himself Pap Hop, and wrote the song *Black Cat Bone* (later covered by Robert Cray). I love his album *Steel Guitar Flash!*. I'm also a great lover of gospel music at the moment – people like The Soul Stirrers, The Pilgrim Travellers and The Swan Silvertones. "I've always loved harmonica players – *Hoodoo Man Blues* by Junior Wells with Buddy Guy is another of my favourite albums – but I've also been listening to a harmonica player from Chicago called Tail Dragger. I like the way his music kind of chugs along. It doesn't ever build up to any sort of climax – he plays like he's in a small club where there's an audience that wants to talk and he's trying not to make too much noise. I've been listening to a lot of world music recently, too, and I just bought this Vietnamese banjo which has only got two strings. I love the weird sound it makes!"

JOSH HOMME

Purveyor of 57 varieties of superior rock stylings, Queens Of The Stone Age head honcho Josh Homme tells us how, when preparing to record an album, superstitions – and a good stretch of the legs – can sometimes be truly inspirational, in this interview from October 2007...

Words JOE MATERA

American film-maker Woody Allen once posed the question: "If you try to fail, and you succeed, which have you done?". For Josh Homme, the unequivocal reply would be: "I've succeeded." The Queens Of The Stone Age mainman has a Zen-like way with the creative process of making a new album.

"One of the main things I want to prioritise right away in the studio is to make the whole process sort of fail," he explains. "That means I've got it out of the way, so there'll be less pressure on both me and the record. After that, I can put my head down and get on with working to try to make as much consistent music as I can... and at the end of the day, I love nothing more than consistency."

It's this very consistency that Homme believes is the primary element to his musical output – one that began with stoner-metallers Kyuss in the early 90s and continues today with the Queens Of The Stone Age, whose latest effort, *Era Vulgaris*, has been out for a couple of months. "I really think that in a lot of ways, it's been my lack of training that drives that consistency," he says. "That's what has allowed me to do what would've been expressed to me as the 'wrong thing'. I love to use the underdog... or, as I say: 'I love to use the worst shit improperly to get the best thing properly'.

"And for me, my guitar has always been a constant. I think that there's a style and delivery that's important to my guitar playing. And because it's the only constant, it gives it a chance to define sounds for the drums and electronics and stuff like that – and that can also really get to have a shining moment because of the consistency of the guitar playing."

LIKE CLOCKWORK

Homme is an unashamed workaholic, but you'd need to be to keep this kind of impetus going on his numerous projects – not just Queens Of The Stone Age, but also Eagles Of Death Metal and, of course, his endless *Desert Sessions* outings. "Work hard... it's the only thing I've ever done," he declares. "That and stay away from the spotlight. I don't walk a lot of the red carpets, and that's not because I think I'm better than anybody else, but because it makes me feel embarrassed."

While he may not care to sashay past the rope line while cheesily grinning for the paparazzi at film premieres, Josh certainly enjoys a good stroll: which is when many of his songwriting ideas come to him.

"When I'm out and about on the streets, I'm hearing the sounds of my own footsteps and the sounds of car alarms going off or people backing up in trucks – and I get inspired by all of this," he says. "It can be listening to somebody driving by in a car, or I can be sitting in my car and listening to the windscreen wipers because they throw off a beat. For me, there's music everywhere I turn. I feel so lucky that I get to notice it all."

At six feet five inches tall, Josh Homme cuts an imposing figure, and he exhibits a suitably no-nonsense demeanour – so it comes as a surprise to hear him admitting to being a superstitious person. "Especially when it comes to guitars," he elaborates. "If I get a good guitar sound right away, then there's not much chance of me changing it. To me, guitars are what they are. You may be able to change

> "[MODDING A GUITAR] IS LIKE MEETING SOMEONE AND IMMEDIATELY BUYING THEM A NOSE JOB"

them by doing all sorts of modifications, but that's something I personally don't do. To use an analogy, it's like meeting someone and immediately buying them a nose job just because you don't like their nose, instead of accepting them the way they are."

This level of acceptance seems to be at odds with the man's reputation; indeed, someone once described him as the most evil guitar player since The Stooges' infamous James Williamson. Homme shrugs off any sort of comparisons. "That's truly not for me to know," he says. "That's the part that I pay less attention to. Although it's nice to get compliments, it's a whole other thing to actually believe what is being said about you. And honestly, I don't care so much about the past. I try to stay in the here and now."

RATHER BE THE DEVIL

However, he does believe that guitar players of today do lack a sense of devilment in their playing. It's a quality that many of the spiritual fathers of rock 'n' roll – Robert Johnson, Elvis, Hendrix, Page – were well versed in. "I think today's guitar players will go for Pro Tools and processing over anything else," he muses. "I've always been a huge fan of the blues. I love the idea of how the blues is all about hitting you in the crotch and the guts. That's something that's always been my main target in my own music, too, and going for all that processing dilutes all that spirit.

"I like things that are tribal and that seem to have a tribal root to them – the kind of thing you get with players like Blind Lemon Jefferson and Howlin' Wolf. I love the fact that music can conjure up something that explains it better than something I don't know how to say with words."

So is Homme is a total devotee of the analogue recording process? "I like to use whatever is available and closest to me at the time," he replies, "but the difference is, I don't use Pro Tools like a correcting machine. I use it more like a tape machine.

"Things have become too angular these days; everybody seems to be making a left turn at the same time. I'm not interested in that at all. I like to see people's scars, and I like to have character. I like mistakes, and I like the fluidity of imperfection. All these qualities are the only things that actually communicate to other people, and communication is the whole reason why I do this in the first place."

Continuing the theme, Homme views his role in his plethora of outfits as that of a shamanic messenger, learned in the fine art of communicating to the musical multitude – employing his instrument in the way a magician weaves spells with his wand, if you will. "I always have been someone that uses the guitar in its totality," he affirms. "It doesn't matter if it's the back of the neck or whatever other part of it. Because the way I look at the guitar, it's a kind of percussion instrument. Deep down, I think I've always been a confused, frustrated drummer. So any stabbing kind of percussiveness is what I'll always enjoy."

Finally, would he ever burn all his credibility and sell his soul by using his powers to make the kind of insidious teen-pop record that garners wall-to-wall airplay and gets the cash tills a-ringin'?

"You know what?" he replies with a devilish grin across his face, "I wouldn't be against it if there was something I really loved about it. I love to chew bubblegum, if know you know what I mean. So who knows?"

Josh Homme in Inglewood California, in 2014, playing his MotorAve BelAire

QUEST FOR A PERFECT SOUND

"For me, guitar playing is more of an idea than the example of the idea," Homme offers. "It takes a thousand examples to express an idea, but it's the idea that matters, you know? There's a delivery in the way I express the idea in my guitar playing. It'll have a blend of heavy sounds with a wiry tone mixed with an acoustic tone. It's all about finding the balance between those things. "I hate to be stuck to one guitar like a superstition, because I'm already superstitious enough about guitars, and to add more weight to the superstition is not really the best thing for me. What's good is to keep finding new guitars – or new old ones."

Now the Ovation's gone, Homme is mainly using three brands: a MotorAve BelAire from North Carolina, an Epiphone Casino, and a number of Aussie-built Matons. "I've got a few Matons," he says. "A Tobacco Burst MS520 with a Bigsby, a Burgundy Mastersound with a black scratchplate and humbuckers, and a blue-and-red MS525. "I'd never heard of Maton before 2001, but because I like things that are different, I started playing one and really enjoyed it. At the time, I was heading down the road of playing only hollowbodies, as I had begun to work them heavily into my sound.

"So I asked Maton if they could make me a hollowbody, and Betty Blue was the result. It's made from Queensland maple and has as 25.5-inch scale length. It's fitted with a TonePros tailpiece and bridge, Grover machineheads and Maton humbuckers. My new one is a BB1200, similar to my Betty Blue, but with a blackwood top and finished in a satin Tobacco Burst."

DEATH OF A TRADEMARK

Josh Homme used to be noted for using an obscure Ovation Ultra GP solidbody electric, but since others took notice, he's jumped ship. "I originally used the Ovation because they were so rare, not because they were sought after," he explains. "I loved the way they played. Ovation didn't make many of them – I think it was one of the last electric models they ever made, around 1984, and they weren't exactly a success. Again, it's all down to liking the underdog. I always have. I just love that. But they resurfaced when I started playing them and being seen with them. People were trying to take advantage of what that meant, not realising that it didn't mean shit, because it was only the one guitar that mattered to me, nothing else. Anyway, my original one, which I've had since I was about 10 years old, was really starting to fall apart after so many years of touring."

MARK KNOPFLER

DESPITE LEADING ONE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST BANDS, MARK KNOPFLER RECKONS HE'S AN UNDERACHIEVER. WE CAUGHT UP WITH THE DIRE STRAITS MAN IN JANUARY 1993 TO TALK PLAYING LIVE, SONGWRITING AND COLLABORATING WITH THE LEGENDARY CHET ATKINS…

Words DOUGLAS J NOBLE

"I remember sitting in a bar listening to *Telegraph Road*," says Mark Knopfler, "and I thought to myself: 'What a lifeless bunch of old toss this is!'" As a highly respected and successful musician, Knopfler is more entitled than most to heartily congratulate himself on his achievements. Perhaps surprisingly, he sees things very differently. As he sings in *On Every Street*: "Every victory has a taste that's bittersweet".

"The jukebox played *Rave On* by Buddy Holly immediately afterwards," he continues, "and to me, it just totally eclipsed *Telegraph Road* and blew it into the weeds. Now, that's my kind of music! *Rave On* was bigger and better, even though there were only three instruments, and it was just bursting with life and joy. That was a real lesson to me and I think you can hear it on the last album."

Having just returned to London from Dire Straits' massive world tour, Mark happily reports that: "It was a lot better organised than the *Brothers In Arms* tour. We had plenty of time off in between legs and we tried to change things around a bit by playing different songs on different nights. In Europe in particular, we've had some really good crowds which take the gig to a higher level. I think we started playing better as the tour progressed, but the thing you have to watch on a long tour is overplaying. I found on the *Brothers In Arms* tour that people find spaces to fill in the music and when you listen back to it, you find everyone is doing too much. This time, we were watching out for it and as a result, it didn't really happen. I really don't know about whether or not you could say we have 'magical nights' when everything just effortlessly falls into place, but I would say that certain songs suit certain players better than others.

"I don't know how often that kind of 'transcending' gig is supposed to happen – if I'm finding my way across the fretboard well and if I'm getting a sound I like, then sure, things can definitely take off."

THE BAND'S TOO STRONG

Never a band for grand gestures or the massive stage shows popular with what he calls the 'jackboot' rock bands, Mark prefers to keep the occasion of a Dire Straits gig relatively low key.

"You have to hold back and avoid letting things get out of hand, but at the same time if you're playing a bigger place, you've just got to project yourselves a little more. It's not something we've pursued as a science – I think you just grow into doing big shows from playing them again and again.

When I was a kid, the City Hall in Newcastle seemed a pretty big place, but walking into it now, it's almost like a front room or my manager's office. One of the enjoyable things about rehearsing is you can find things to do differently from the album version – this band was flexible enough to do all sorts of things. Sometimes, if the arrangement on an album is alright, we'd pretty much stick to it. But generally speaking, on this tour we changed things about quite a lot, even *Sultans*....

"There were a lot of us onstage and the interplay between everyone increased as the tour went on – first, you find things to play off each other in rehearsal, then you find more and more as the tour progresses and the song takes its shape. People find their own parts better or find variations, and the thing develops into something else. We didn't really have a single musical leader onstage. Sometimes, you have to take a groove from a drummer, but on other things, the rhythm section has to follow the guitar.

"On something like *Heavy Fuel*, you just go with the drum beat, whereas on something with an R&B feel like *Two Young Lovers*, the rhythm section has to tuck in behind the guitars – two opposite situations. Compared to all the bands that I've played in, whether it's my early bands or Dire Straits or other people's bands, I would say this line-up was actually the loudest band I've played in. That can be difficult for the sound people because of leakage, but I like a fair bit of level onstage. If you're too careful about stage levels, then you lose a little grease – you've got to know that there's a rock band playing there.

"Terry Williams was the loudest drummer the stage crew had heard in terms of decibel levels, but Chris Whitten was hitting them even harder, going through drum heads like there was no tomorrow. Also, the way the stage was built, with Chris quite high up and back, made him hit the drums even harder than he normally would!

"Peoples' monitors were pretty damn loud as well. You'd walk up to someone else's monitor and go: 'My God, what's this?', and a couple of the guys in the band have experimented with earplugs. "If you're a keyboard player in the middle of a racket like that with a hard-hitting drummer behind you, a great big beefy percussionist behind you, three guitar players wanging away in front and you're standing on top of the guitar players' cabinets, which are forming your floor... Well, you're going to need a fair bit of level just to be able to hear what you're doing yourself. It took a while to get that sorted out, but we got there in the end. We had a phenomenal sound crew who've got a real reputation for getting things sorted out. Basically, we just dump the sound problems in their lap and they sort things out – we didn't even have to do soundchecks every night. If we were going to be playing several nights in a particularly difficult hall then we would do a soundcheck, but otherwise, we didn't, even with a nine-piece band using lots of different instruments – Paul Franklin played three different kinds of steel guitar, Chris White played three or four different kinds of saxophone and percussion. Phil Palmer used a handful of guitars and so did I – so there was a lot of stuff to check! Plus, we had five people singing."

> "*BROTHERS IN ARMS* WOULD SOUND VERY DIFFERENT IF WE HAD GIGGED THE SONGS FIRST"

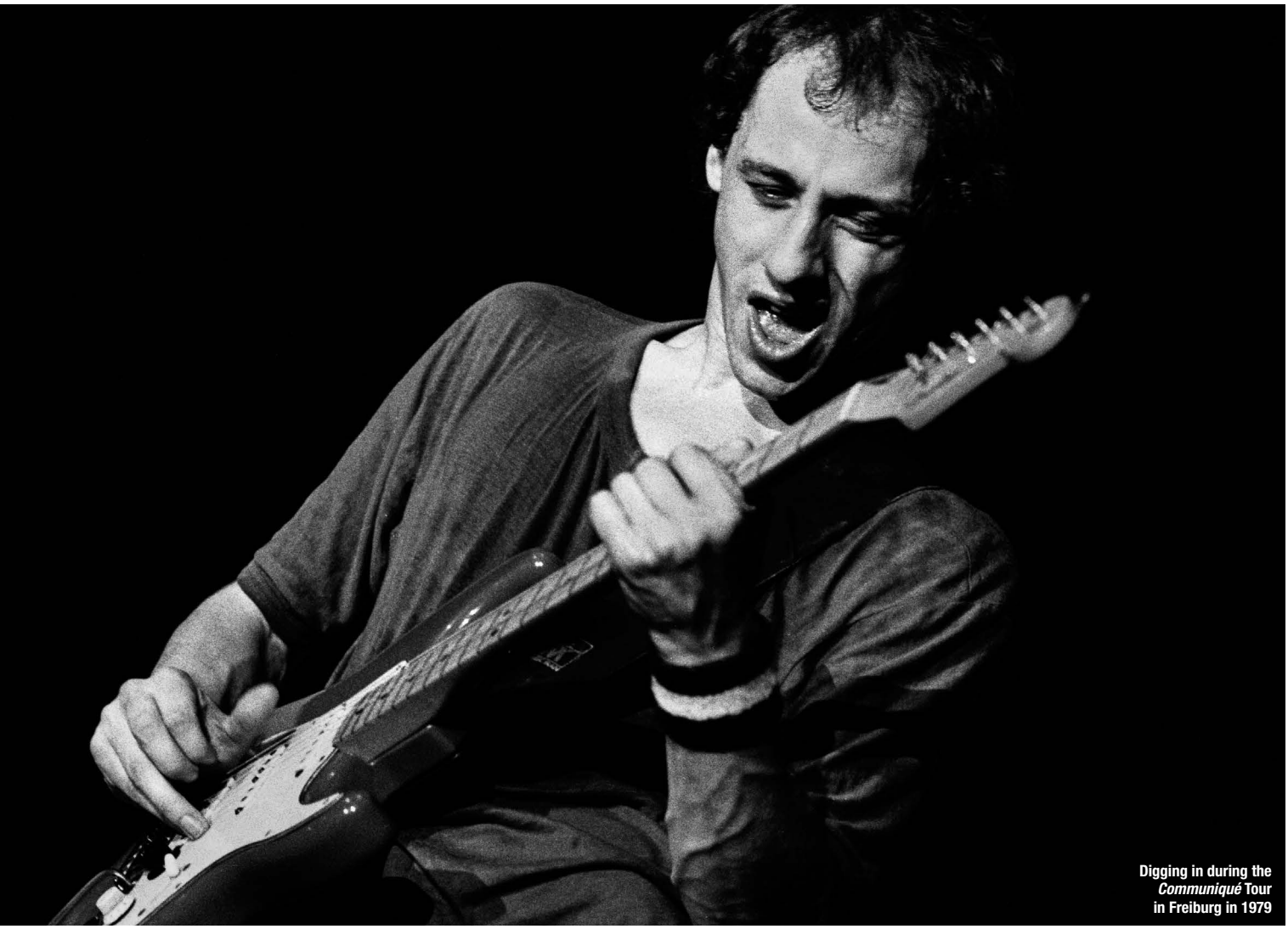
Mark plays one of his Les Paul Standards on the *Kill To Get Crimson* Tour in 2008 in Milan, Italy

SETTING ME UP

"I always start with kick, snare and hi-hat in my monitors, with the hi-hat a bit louder than you would hear it in a normal mix – so that if I'm playing 16th notes, I can tuck in to the beat. I used to try to make sure everyone got the hi-hat, especially for fast rhythmic playing when it helps to keep things together. On this tour, there was always stacks of rhythm because Danny on percussion was helping Chris with the groove, so there would be a mighty shaker there, or something else that would keep you grooving.

"You've got to be really careful that you don't cloud your monitors with far too much – I did want to have an overall mix of the band, but it ends up being a little bit tricky – sometimes it's best just to use someone's stage level for monitoring. After a while, your monitor man gets used to what every single person needs for every single song – which is a hell of a lot of combinations! Obviously, if you can't hear all the background vocals perfectly, you can't complain – you've got to be practical. As long as you've got the basics there and are able to play in time, then you're three-quarters of the way there.

"Songs always change as you gig them, especially at first. When we did the first Dire Straits album, we'd rehearsed hard and gigged hard, so we just had to go into the studio, set the equipment up and play. *Brothers In Arms* and *On Every Street* would sound very different if we had gigged the songs first. "Actually, I don't think any of the Dire Straits albums are all that good. *On Every Street* is the best in a lot of ways, 'cause a lot of the stuff was recorded with everyone playing together. We also had the time to get to know the songs better and do a bit of work on sounds and arrangements. But I certainly don't enjoy



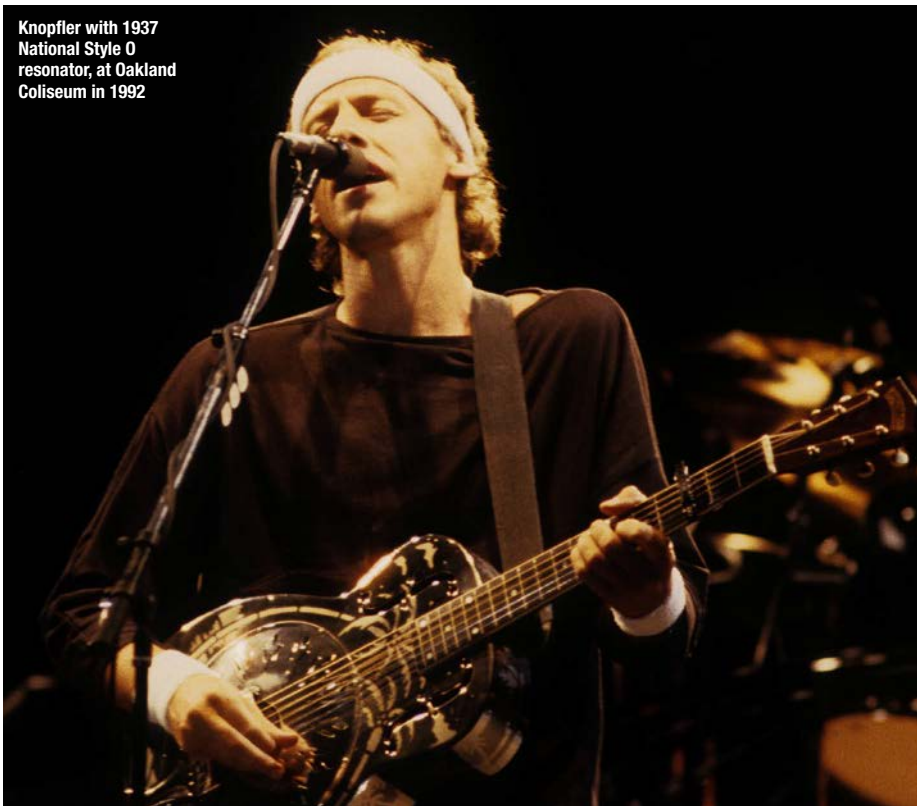
Digging in during the *Communiqué* Tour in Freiburg in 1979

listening to stuff that I've done in the past. It makes me very uncomfortable."

Although Mark's often accused of playing safe, this criticism can hardly apply to some of his more epic songs, such as *Private Investigations* and that 'lifeless bunch of old toss', *Telegraph Road*.

"Yeah, I guess I was experimenting with form and length on those songs. We still play them onstage, but I certainly wouldn't do anything like that now – I don't write stuff like that any more. My favourite music is simple, basic, straightforward music – little songs, if you like – so I really don't know how I found myself doing all that stuff! I'm credited with producing *Love Over Gold*, but 'producer' is a very loose term. Sometimes, a band will be producing themselves, even though there is someone else's name on it.

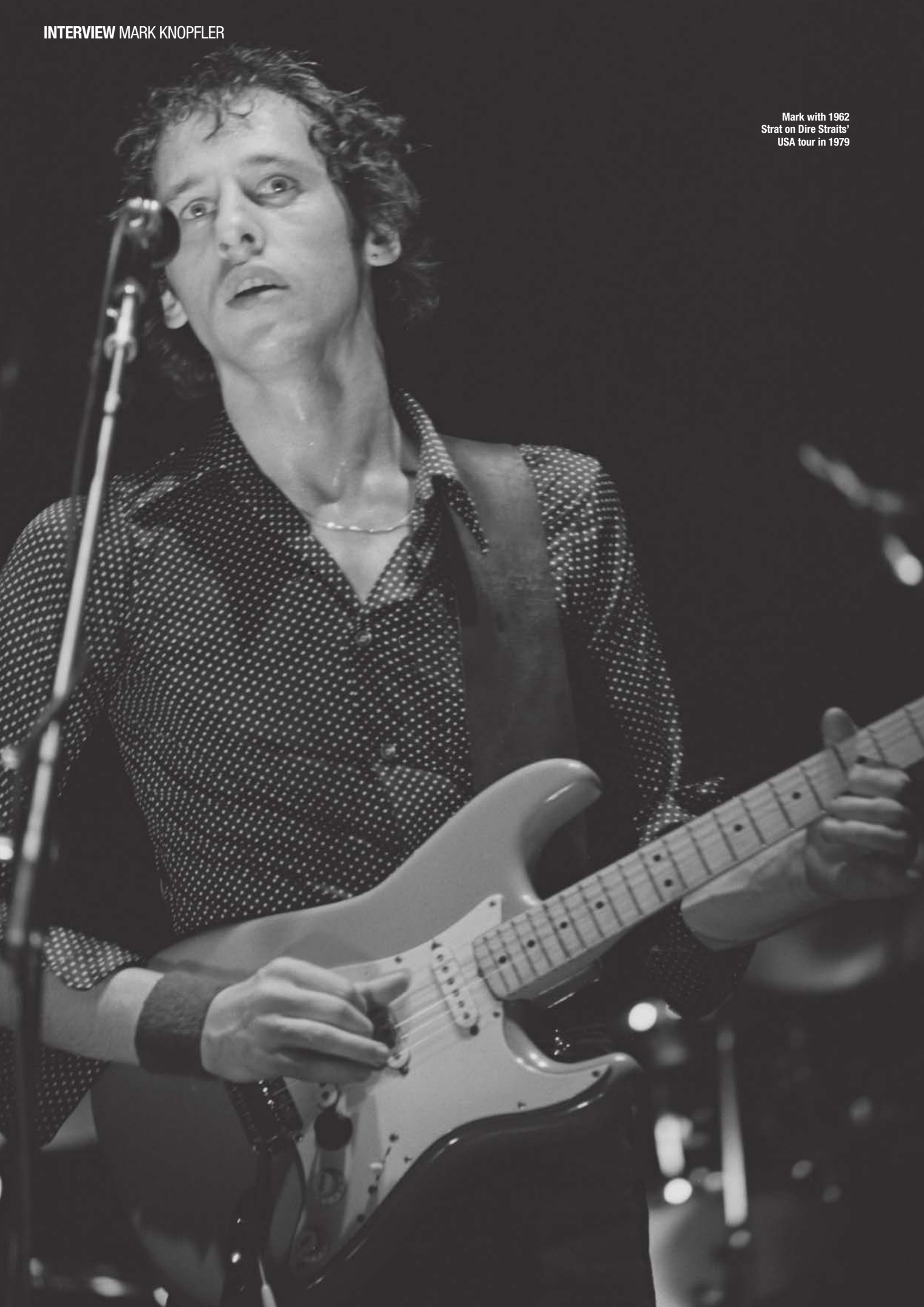
"The term is flexible and depends on who is recording – sometimes, producers just direct traffic and other times, it's an administrative role of signing session players' forms. Usually, I'd think it's a cooperation between the artist and the producer – the producer brings an outside mind to the record."



Knopfler with 1937 National Style O resonator, at Oakland Coliseum in 1992

HIT BUSINESS

Around about the same time, when Mark was 'producing' *Love Over Gold*, came a



Mark with 1962 Strat on Dire Straits' USA tour in 1979

Mark with his EMG-equipped Pensa-Suhr in Rotterdam in 1992

more demanding challenge – writing his first soundtrack, for *Local Hero*. "It has probably been the most successful sound in terms of sales, but I'd say none of them have been much good, really," he reflects. "It's a horrible business – I think they should have hired someone who can do the job properly. When I'm doing soundtracks, I think I just stagger from one crisis to the next! It's quite different from songwriting and requires a lot more discipline, which I just don't have."

Known for his silky Strat tone, Mark notably departed from his trademark sound for *Money For Nothing* from *Brothers In Arms*.

"I was using my Les Paul through a wah-wah pedal and I set the pedal at a certain point which got that particular tone. My co-producer and engineer, Neil Dorfsman, put some fancy little effect on it as well, but the sound was basically coming from the pedal being set in one place.

"I couldn't remember how to do it later – when I had to recreate it for Weird Al's spoof version, I just couldn't get the sound. Guy Fletcher remembered that it was through a pedal and then it all came together – we had the Marshall all cranked up, but couldn't get the tone until I used the wah-wah."

As a producer in his own right, Mark has definite ideas about how musicians ought to work in the studio. "I think the thing that's wrong with modern recording is that the musician is very often robbed of his right to play with other musicians. Very often, people will find themselves overdubbing on tracks made by people they haven't even met!

"Something happens to the air when you are all playing together, and multitrack recording hadn't been around for very long before musicians started being stuck in isolation booths and there was no spill – leakage and spill are obviously a total nightmare for engineers, but I love it. When you find yourself in the professional recording process, you take onboard all the stuff that engineers and producers do and it's not always for the best.

> "WE HAD THE MARSHALL ALL CRANKED UP, BUT COULDN'T GET THE TONE UNTIL I USED THE WAH-WAH"

"If you've got a suitable studio and a band that's good enough, then I think it's a good idea to record things together, so you can play off each other. The recording process encourages you to go for perfect performances each time, but mistakes on record start to sound good after a while. There are piles of mistakes on Dire Straits' records... but probably not enough! I could point out mistakes in just about everything."

CHET LUCKY

"When I started working with Chet Atkins on the *Neck And Neck* album, again, we were working on a limited budget – I refused payment for the album, but I think in the end, we split the royalty in half. When I first went over to work with Chet, he had a bunch of guitarists come in from all over the world – I think I was the only Englishman. I had made enough money from music and I knew Chet didn't have the finances to pay huge great session fees. I was just happy to be asked and, in the end, we ended up doing a record together. Again, it was a home-studio thing recorded at Chet's place and we only spent a couple of days in a 'proper' studio.

"Working with Chet and other fine musicians like him really helped my playing – you're always learning when you play with good musicians. I like the idea of change – I don't want to stay static. I like the way I play in my heart and I wouldn't want to be anyone else, but I'm conscious that there's a whole world of playing out there that I don't do – it's bottomless, really.

LEFT OVER RIGHT

"If I get a book out, I'll find something and make it my own – either by adding my own style, or because I couldn't play it properly in the first place! I'm left-handed, but I play right-handed. They tried to teach me violin at school for two or three years – right-handed – so by the time I was 15, I was into the habit of playing that way round. It has some advantages – it obviously means my strong hand is on the neck for a good vibrato. I can pull or bend three strings all at the same time quite easily. When I was learning the guitar, I used to play with a pick a lot – a pick is the biggest amplifier there is and not using a pick is the main difference in my style.

"When the fingerpicking style and flatpick style were fusing together for me, I realised I was doing things with my fingers that I used to do with a pick, but it was more comfortable

Live, Mark has also played a variety of S-type guitars made by John Suhr

and more rhythmic with my fingers. This was well before Dire Straits – I remember being conscious of the style developing when I was sleeping on someone's floor in Turnpike Lane. They had a cheap copy of a Gibson Dove acoustic with very light strings and I realised the pick was becoming redundant.

"I don't play all that much on the road, apart from the gigs. In-between tours, I get the chance to sit down and play a bit – I intend to work out more of a structured routine. I spent some time a few years ago getting some books out and studying a bit, because I was being asked to play sessions with proper musicians.

THE SOLO VOICE

"When I'm working on a solo, I don't really know how it comes about. I think not being able to sing means the guitar becomes like a voice and you make it do things that you wouldn't do otherwise. Perhaps if you can't sing, you push a little harder with your instrument, but I've never really thought about that. There are lots of guitarists and musicians with tremendous facility, but they might not be musicians to me – 'musician' is a difficult term. There's a lot more to it than just technique.

"Van Morrison has great facility with his voice, but not the same facility with piano or guitar – but that doesn't matter. He understands what music is and his roots go very deep into Celtic music and the blues. He's capable of great moments of fusion of the two – that's something that has little to do with facility or book knowledge. Having good chops definitely helps, but it's not the whole story."

> "IT HELPS WHEN YOU'RE LEARNING SOMETHING NEW TO HAVE A FEEL FOR WHAT'S COME BEFORE"

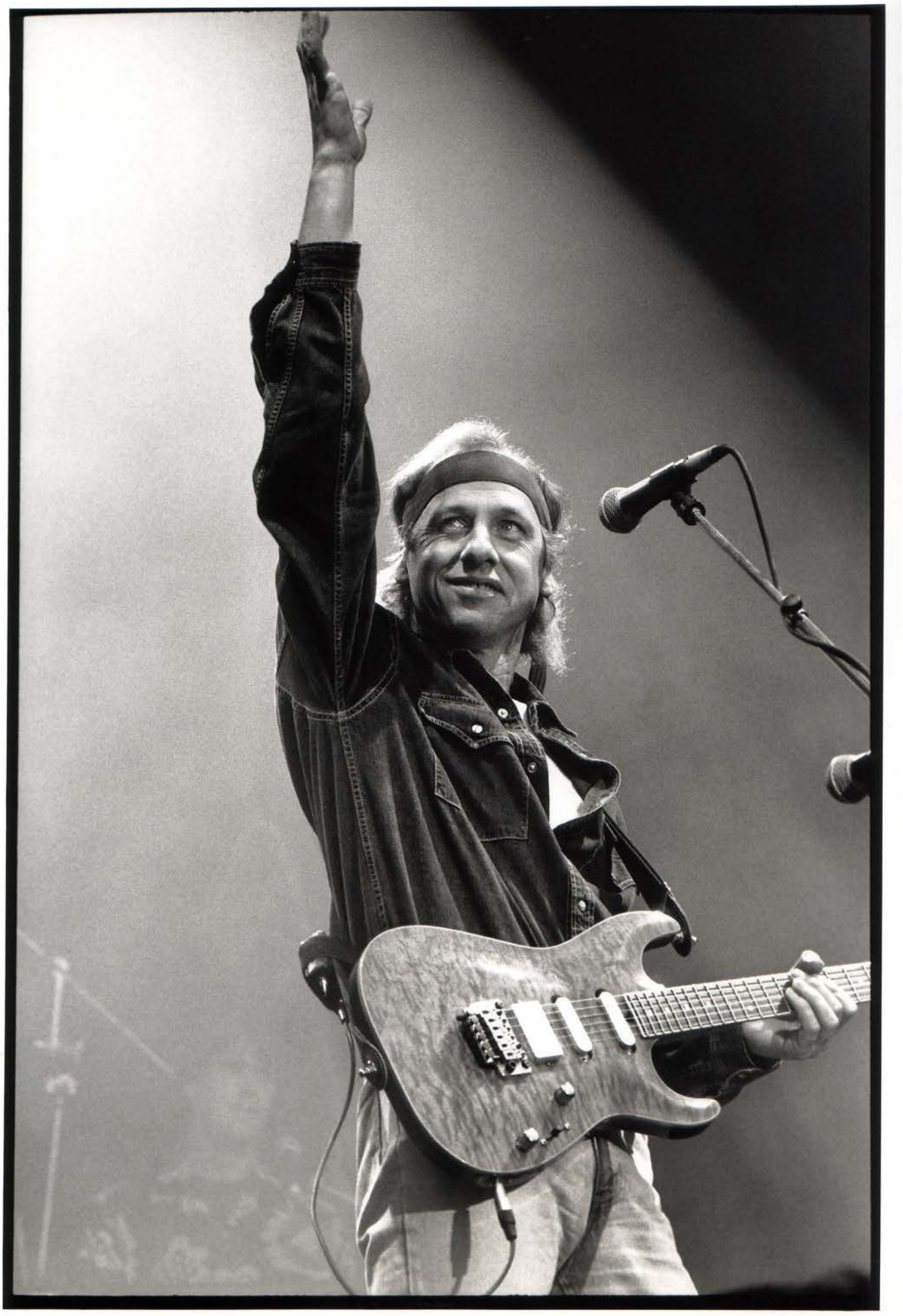
COUNTRY INFLUENCE

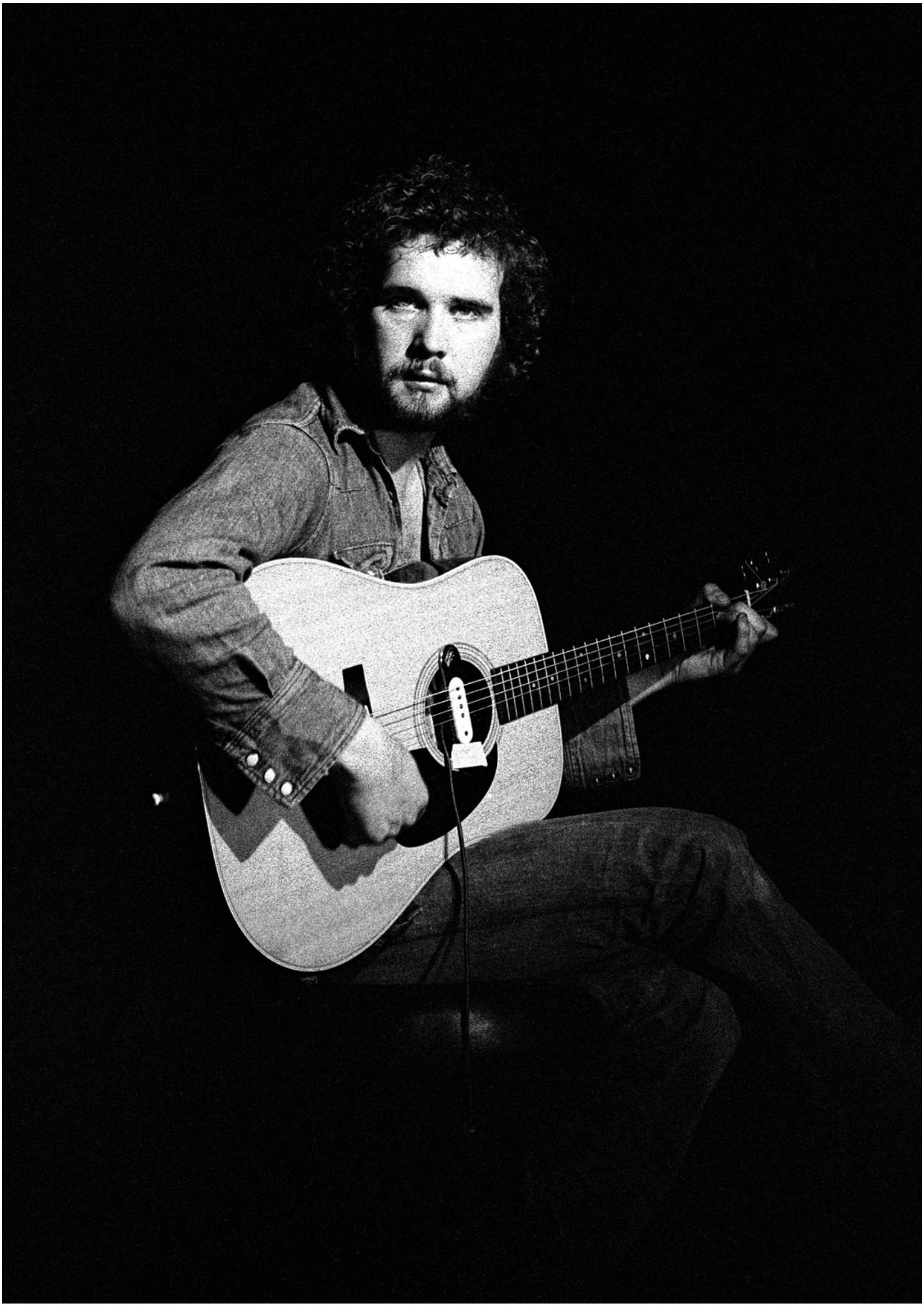
"I think kids learning from transcription books is fine, but I think the best way to learn music is from lots and lots of old records. It helps when you're learning something new to have some sort of feel for what has come before. BB King wouldn't play the way he played unless he'd heard Lonnie Johnson.

"As soon as you play with Chet, you realise you might as well forget trying to do Chet's thing, so I didn't have to practise especially for it – I just tried to be myself. Playing with Chet was a tremendous privilege, because you can steal things and make them your own. There's a little lick on *When It Comes To You* that I stole from him – we were playing around in open tuning one day and he played this great lick. He showed me it and I stuck it right into that song. One of the great things about Chet is he's got piles of these little licks. If you're recording with him, I would just wait around until he came up with something and then learn it from him.

"I've always listened to country music and I've been going to Nashville for years – that influence has come out more on the last album. They've recorded a lot of my stuff in Nashville and it's come to be more and more over the years. I've always loved country and blues and I guess I was listening to a lot of that around about the time of *On Every Street* – it just seemed such a relief from all the other crap that was being made at the time."

A man who clearly loves his job, Mark is no sooner off the road than he's back into the studio again – but some projects are apparently more enjoyable than others. "I've just started doing the next live Dire Straits album and I'm actually bored out of my mind already. It's just basically listening to the same songs over and over trying to choose the best performances. It's miserable – I can't wait to finish it and do something else!"





JOHN MARTYN

John Martyn had battled through some serious health difficulties to create a fine album when we caught up with the folk maestro on the comeback trail to talk gear, effects and recently broken guitars in this interview from March 2004...

Words MICHAEL HEATLEY

Since he entered the public consciousness with his debut album *London Conversation* in 1967 (he was the Island label's first white solo singer), John Martyn has earned not only respect, but a reputation for not suffering fools gladly. So pity the poor interviewer sent to talk to him the day after his beloved '65 Gibson SG lost its headstock on the stage of London's Queen Elizabeth Hall...

But the rule with John Martyn is that there are no rules – because, after losing a lower leg in April last year when a bursting cyst led to an amputation below the knee, this is a man so glad to be playing live again, he's able to see the bright side of just about anything.

"Sadly, the guitar fell to the floor and the headstock broke!" Martyn mock-sobs, then decides to put a gruff Glaswegian gloss on proceedings. "I'd noticed a crack in the headstock before we went on tour and I asked John Giblin, my bass player who deals in guitars, if he could get me another... and last night, that came in very handy."

The 'new' SG, Martyn explains, could prove to be an even better instrument. "It has a nice, fatter neck, though it's not quite as strong. I think it's 1970-ish. I've had my '65 since, ooh, about 1969." Nevertheless, the beloved original is undergoing repair, and its fate won't persuade its owner to lock such valuable vintage guitars away. "No, no, they've got to be used," he insists. "No point having them, otherwise."

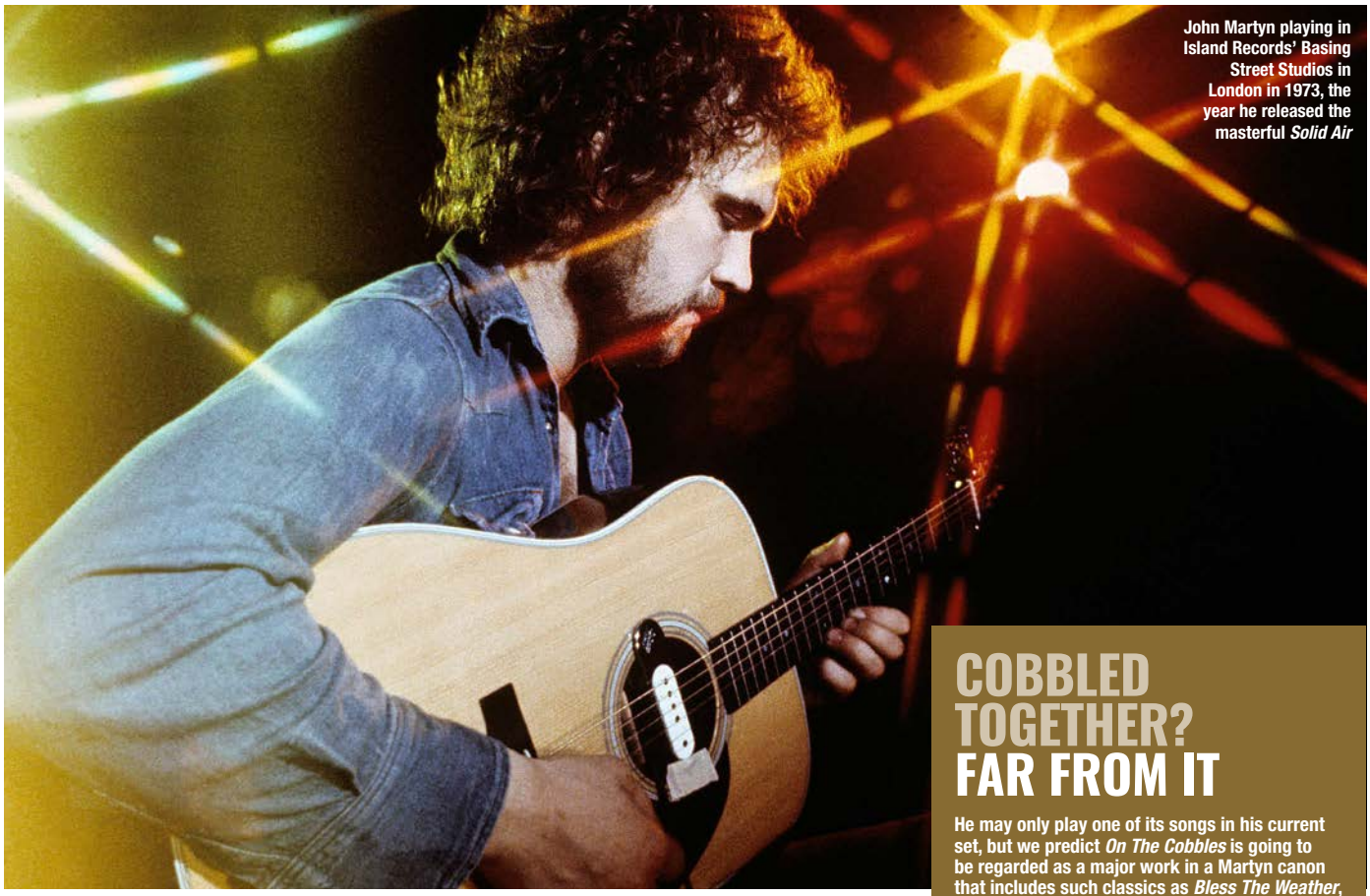
Significantly, in view of his recent trials, the sole song from new album *On The Cobbles* he chose to showcase on his recent UK tour is *My Creator*. Has John Martyn gone religious on us? It seems to be the case...

"Not to be too holy about it, but it is a bit like a prayer," Martyn says. "That tune is going to be with me for years. I intend to rewrite it almost every night, if you know what I mean. It's improvising – very simple. It's the chance I had to write a horn line and I'm very proud of it. I intend to do a lot more of that!"

PERSONAL EFFECTS

Interestingly, the use of effects that has now become one of John Martyn's many sonic trademarks was originally done with the intention of making his guitar sound more like a horn. "Yeah, I wanted the sustain a horn gets," he confirms, "and I managed it – in a way. Not as soulfully as a horn; you can't

Martyn at the Paradiso in
Amsterdam in 1989



John Martyn playing in Island Records' Basing Street Studios in London in 1973, the year he released the masterful *Solid Air*

beat a lovely horn! But the Echoplex and the rhythmic stuff do sound good."

You'd assume that these days, he'd use a multi-FX or a Pod, but he cheerfully admits he totes around "much the same gear as I used to, to be honest". He's been known to do running repairs with a screwdriver while talking to his audience, though maybe those days are gone now – as, indeed, is his beloved Echoplex, stolen in Liverpool four years ago.

"Since then, I've been using an Alesis, which is very good. But there's a lot of compression on it, so it tends to hiss a lot, and there's a trigger at the top, which is a nuisance," he says. "But the guy who developed the Echoplex is supposed to be putting it back on the market; I'm in touch with him, and I'm looking forward to using it."

The new album sees the mysterious 'Mutron guitar' credited on several tracks. "They're now called Q-Trons," Martyn explains (different company, though: he uses an Electro-Harmonix Q-Tron+). "It's an automatic wah-wah that goes through five or six octaves. I like it because it's very 'muddly' and I've always liked using a tonic rather than a straight third or a fifth as what I call a 'hanger' – a suspended chord running all the way through the tune. You don't hear it... in fact, it just adds body. It's subliminal. If you put some fuzz on it, turn it down to a very low level and scrub away like an old lady with a nailbrush, it ends up forming a blanket effect, which I like. Instead of hanging there going 'oooo-ooo' it can go 'oooo-eee-oh'... if that makes any sense!" he chortles. "You can play one chord, fiddle around and make it moveable."

There's a trade secret or two mixed in there among the techno-babble – but if would-be Martyns want to learn how he does it, he has nothing to hide.

"I'll tell anybody anything! I used to follow people around. I didn't ask, I used to sit at the front and watch – it's the best way to learn. The best way to figure out how to do things is watch the fingers. I watched all kinds of people! Not rock 'n' roll, though, it was all folk for me. Davy Graham was my hero and still is. Hamish Imlach is a very underrated guitarist with a very strange style, a cross between flamenco and blues. His right hand was like a bee's wing. Very cool player."

MARTYN'S MARTINS

Talk turns to when he started using different tunings: "I was about 17... so subtract 17 from 55," he laughs. In concert, Martyn will limit himself to a handful: "I don't use as many tunings as I used to," he confirms. "I used

"I WATCHED ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE! IT WAS ALL FOLK FOR ME. DAVY GRAHAM WAS MY HERO AND STILL IS"

COBBLED TOGETHER? FAR FROM IT

He may only play one of its songs in his current set, but we predict *On The Cobbles* is going to be regarded as a major work in a Martyn canon that includes such classics as *Bless The Weather*, *Solid Air*, *One World* (due out in augmented, remastered form shortly on Island) and *Grace And Danger*.

The new album kicks off with a song by Frankie Miller, the Scots singer who in 1994 suffered a major brain haemorrhage – a setback from which, against the odds, he's fought back, to enjoy a quality of life that once seemed impossible. "He's getting better now," John confirms. "He was really bad there for a year or two. He's gradually regaining his strength. There but for fortune goes you or I. Terrible thing to happen… he's a lovely little fella."

So where did the song *Baby Come Home* come from? "Myself and a lot of other people from Glasgow – Billy Connolly was the most famous – all said we'd record some songs by him. I wanted to do that but it wasn't finished, so I finished it off and credited it to him. Don't tell anybody! They did have a benefit concert for him, but I didn't fancy that. So this was like a more subtle way of doing a benefit for him."

Two well-known names guesting on the album are soul diva Mavis Staples, who duets on the traditional *Goodnight Irene*, and Paul Weller. "I met Mavis years ago," John says, "but we had to send her the tape because I was too ill to travel. We're big friends, and she wanted to do more, so I may involve myself in a project with her." And what of Independiente labelmate Weller, who features on *Under My Wing*? "He's a lovely geezer, what you see is what you get. He's still the ultimate mod. I love mods, 'cos I was one before I was a hippie!" And, unlike The Verve, the Modfather's fans like him…

John has stated in other interviews that he finds *On The Cobbles* too painful to listen to because of the way he was feeling when it was recorded. Now, though, he's clearly warming to it. "At times, I really like it, other times it's 'fuck me, I remember that – it was awful!'. I remember taking 17 painkillers and needing half a bottle of Scotch before you can be half-reasonable. Having to be carried into the studios, singing flat on my back because I couldn't even sit up… it's coloured by those kind of memories today. But it's a seriously nice album."

Martyn's DeArmond soundhole pickup went to his effects chain; the Barcus Berry contact pickup behind the bridge went to a dry channel

three last night – DADGAD, C and straight tuning. I normally use a fiddle tuning on the electric and I use that all the way through the set. It's all in fifths instead of thirds. In America they call it cello tuning."

His acoustic-guitar playing is arguably better known than his electric – so is he rock, folk or what? "I love playing guitar of any type," he says. "There's a different context for both sorts – it's whatever fills the bill."

The two acoustics he takes on tour are both Martins, and were gifts from the company. "One's a D-28 and one's a C something, I can't remember. The D-28 is particularly lovely, 'cos it's got Maltese crosses all over it, and on the bridge it has inlays of mother of pearl. It's a lovely guitar, sounds nice and sweet."

John Martyn has never run away from a challenge... well, maybe just the one. The Verve, when in their chart-topping pomp, asked John to open their homecoming show in the grounds of Wigan's Haigh Hall in 1998. He'd been booked to play with his own band, but an administrative mix-up led to him taking the stage unrehearsed and without having had a soundcheck, accompanied by only an acoustic and percussionist Arran Ahmun. To cap it all, his guitar strap broke – but despite adversity and 32,000 Verve fans who'd probably never heard of him, so full was the sound the duo made that a member of support act Beck's entourage dashed round to find out "who the band was on stage!"

"I SCUTTLED OFF STAGE AFTER 20 MINUTES; THE VERVE AUDIENCE HAD A TOTALLY DIFFERENT MINDSET TO ME"

John's memories of the event are less happy. "It was awful!" he cringes. "The age gap was just ridiculous, so I scuttled off stage after 20 minutes; the Verve audience had a totally different mindset to me." (To show there's no hard feelings, the band's ex-lead guitarist Nick McCabe appears on the new album.)

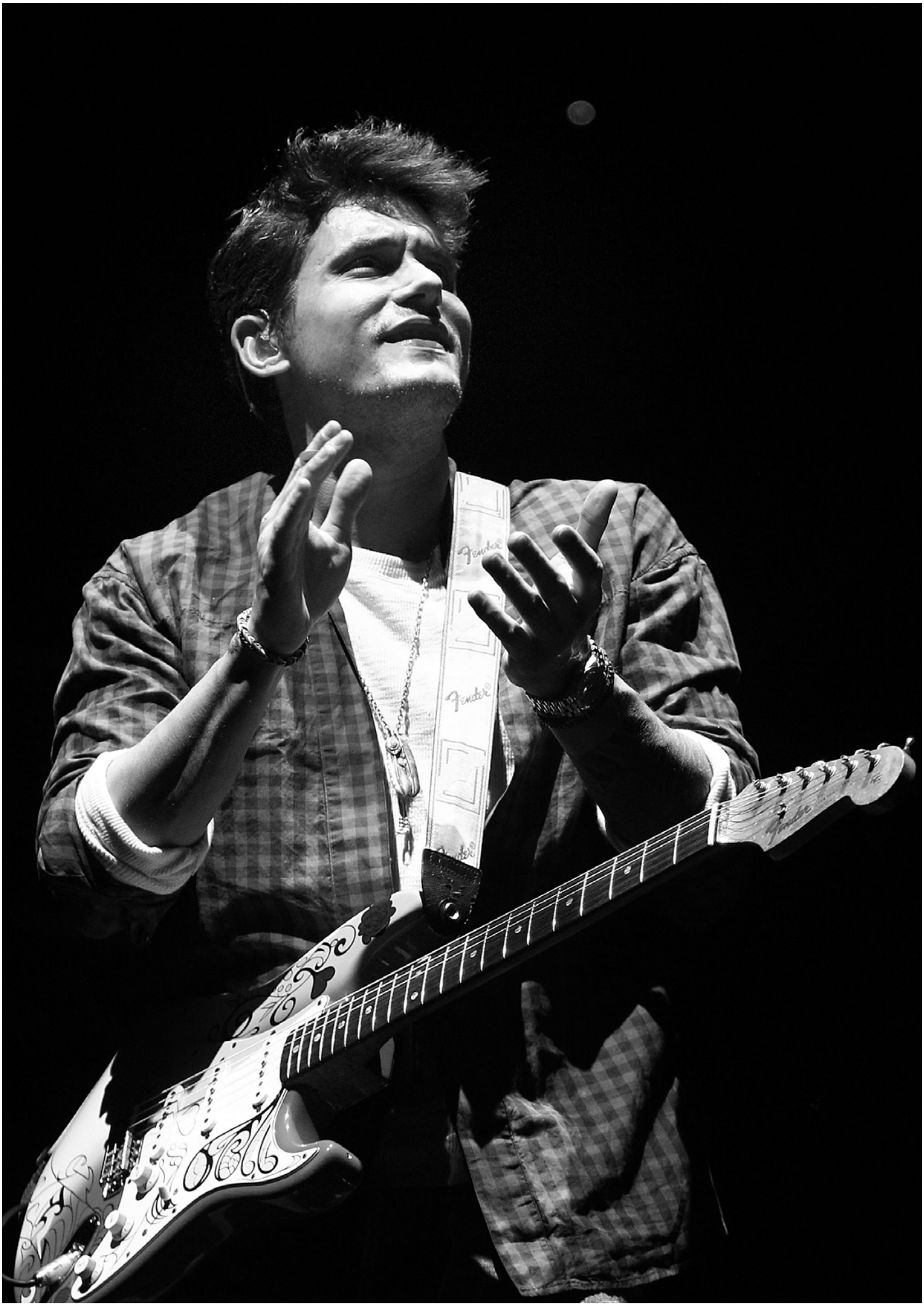
John's next challenge is to play gigs standing up. "I sit at the moment, but that's going to stop. I tried the first five or six standing, but it was too painful, it disturbed my concentration. But it's early days: they say it takes two years for a prosthesis to settle down and I've only had mine for three, four, five months."

Anyone hoping to hear more of *On The Cobbles* live may have a wait – not because the man's retiring, but because he's used his time off the boards to write material for another album. But live performance remains his lifeblood. "I couldn't wait to get back to it, for sure. It's a very rewarding thing to do, the nicest way to make money I know. It's what I live for, it's my business."

The gig at London's QEH where a besotted female fan presented him with a floral bouquet (not a dry eye in the house) was clearly a success for both audience and performer. But what of the nights when it doesn't go so well? John admits he's had a few of those...

"You can go on and play your balls off, the best thing you've done for a month, and the audience remain indifferent for some reason. Then you can play a mediocre set and they go potty. It's strange." He warms to his theme. "Gigs should be graded! Out of ten gigs, seven should be really fucking good, one's allowed to be a disaster and two should be really shining, that's what I think. Two should be fucking outstanding and you're allowed to have one bummer."

If you know just one John Martyn song, it's probably *May You Never*, subject of cover versions from everyone from Eric Clapton to, most recently, Judie Tzuke. Clichéd as it may seem, the valediction 'may you never stop playing' seemed an appropriate way to end our London conversation with John Martyn. "I wouldn't consider it," comes the immediate answer. And in the end, what's a broken guitar between friends?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JOHN MAYER

His first record sold three million copies, propelling him to mainstream stardom and making him a fixture on *MTV* – but will the new John Mayer album, *Heavier Things*, further reshape the image of the singer-songwriter? We uncover the roots of his success in this interview from April 2003...

Words JOHN CALLAGHAN

Kicking off with the stark statement "I'm a pretty bad conversationalist when it comes to guitars and guitar playing" isn't necessarily recommended in *The Rough Guide To Being Interviewed By A Guitar Magazine*, but John Mayer's modesty belies both his skills with a six-string and the effect those skills have on his listeners. And this man loves guitars.

Despite the fact that his debut record *Room For Squares* still roosts in the Billboard Top 100 almost two years after its entrance, Mayer's recent follow-up *Heavier Things* still hit the No. 1 spot in the US. His warm-hearted brand of pop-blues is deceptively beguiling, and the inventive, haunting, propulsive strains of *Bigger Than My Body* show exactly why record buyers see this dropout from the Berklee College Of Music as the intelligent, acceptable face of mainstream music. He's also been credited with offering a new way in which the blues can evolve and retain its relevance in the 21st century without retreading the same old riffs and shuffles of the greats.

"I can completely understand players who sound like their heroes," defends Mayer. "After all, it's often the reason why people pick up a guitar in the first place. It's good to sound like the person you love, but it can be hard to get off it – particularly when you've worked so long to achieve just that."

Though he has tipped Jeff Buckley, Eric Clapton and Nick Drake as important influences on his music, the guitarist John Mayer idolised as a kid was Stevie Ray Vaughan – a rare thing among Connecticut teenagers in the grunge-loving early 90s. "Hearing Kenny Wayne Shepherd was also important to me," he recalls. "I don't want to talk about what's good or bad about his playing, but when I heard him I realised that I wasn't alone... there were other people my age out there who loved Stevie Ray, too."

So why did John Mayer move on from Texas blues? "Well, there were a lot of things I wanted to do that I couldn't do in 12 bars, or whatever, so I really had to change," he explains. "And, you know, the more I keep playing, the more I realise that the sound of my heart isn't a solo, or a single-note run, it's an interesting chord change. So while I love things on the new record like the lead break on *Come Back To Bed*, my favourite guitar part is on *Wheel* – and it's just this great little bend on a chord change."

WAITING ON THE CHORD TO CHANGE

For Mayer, his guitar playing and his songwriting are inextricably linked, and he takes constant inspiration from the infinite possibilities of six vibrating strings. "The thing about this record was that so much of it was pure reflex – I'd just hear something and then start playing it," he says. "The whole process felt so immediate that when someone asked me if I was ready to do a tablature book of it, my response was 'Hell, no!'.

"*Room For Squares* was pretty deliberate, whereas this one was a lot more Zen. For example, the figure at the beginning of *New Deep* is so much fun to play, and *Clarity* is just so liberating, because it's really straightforward."

For all the ease with which the new songs flowed, Mayer concedes that non-stop touring ended up spoiling rather than sharpening his chops. "Everything on stage became so sloppy," he sighs. "Playing in big places sometimes feels kinda like being a hotdog in a hallway. So when it came to making the record, the studio seemed like such a small area! It took a bit of getting used to. I definitely learned how to play with the drums again, because in the past that's been one of my main flaws. It's such a forgotten part of being a guitar player; it's not just about locking in with the bass player. If you lock in with the drummer, that's the key.

By the end of the record, I was getting pretty precise. Jack [Joseph Puig] the producer really taught me how to key in on tones and work on what was best for the guitar sound."

Producer Puig has formerly worked with Sheryl Crow, No Doubt and The Black Crowes,

John Mayer at Jones Beach Theater in 2017 in New York during his *The Search For Everything* Tour

and apparently his focus was so exactingly single-minded that he only allowed one guitar cable to be used during recording – with one end marked 'tuner' and the other marked 'guitar', to ensure it was always used exactly the same way round.

This singularity didn't extend to the guitars, though, as this time, John Mayer realised that possessing just two electrics and a couple of acoustics was doing very little for his tonal variation. Now, it turned out, was the ideal time to significantly expand upon his relatively meagre guitar collection.

YOUR HOLLOWBODY IS FROM MARYLAND

The faithful SRV signature Strat has now been augmented by a pair of Custom Shop Relic Strats – "The only real difference is that one's Sunburst and the other is White. The colour doesn't matter to me... I'm no CC DeVille!" – while wider, fatter sounds came courtesy of a PRS Hollowbody. Playing the PRS came as something of a revelation: until now, Mayer had wrongly believed the brand to be tainted with a nu-metal stigma.

Thus converted to the humbucker path, he also invested in a Gibson Flying V. "You can play anything on a Flying V," he maintains. "Pop, rock... hell, Albert King played incredible blues on a Flying V. So why limit it?"

All the guitars were put through a treasured Dumble Overdrive Special amp. Mayer now has two of these handbuilt, high-end beauties, one reserved for recording and kept "safe and sound at an undisclosed location", the other nominated for touring duties, albeit under heavy guard. "I'm not someone who brags about how great my gear is," he says, "it just happens that those are the best amps I've ever heard... and I happen to own them!"

> "FIND A GUITAR'S SWEET SPOT AND YOU'LL COME UP WITH SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE WANT TO HEAR"

When it comes to acoustics, Mayer is a Martin man all the way. He owns an OM-42, an HD-35 and an OM-28V; the lead break on *Daughters* was played on a Martin 000-28EC, while nominated dreadnoughts included a pearl-inlaid D-41 and a DM3MD, Martin's Dave Matthews signature model.

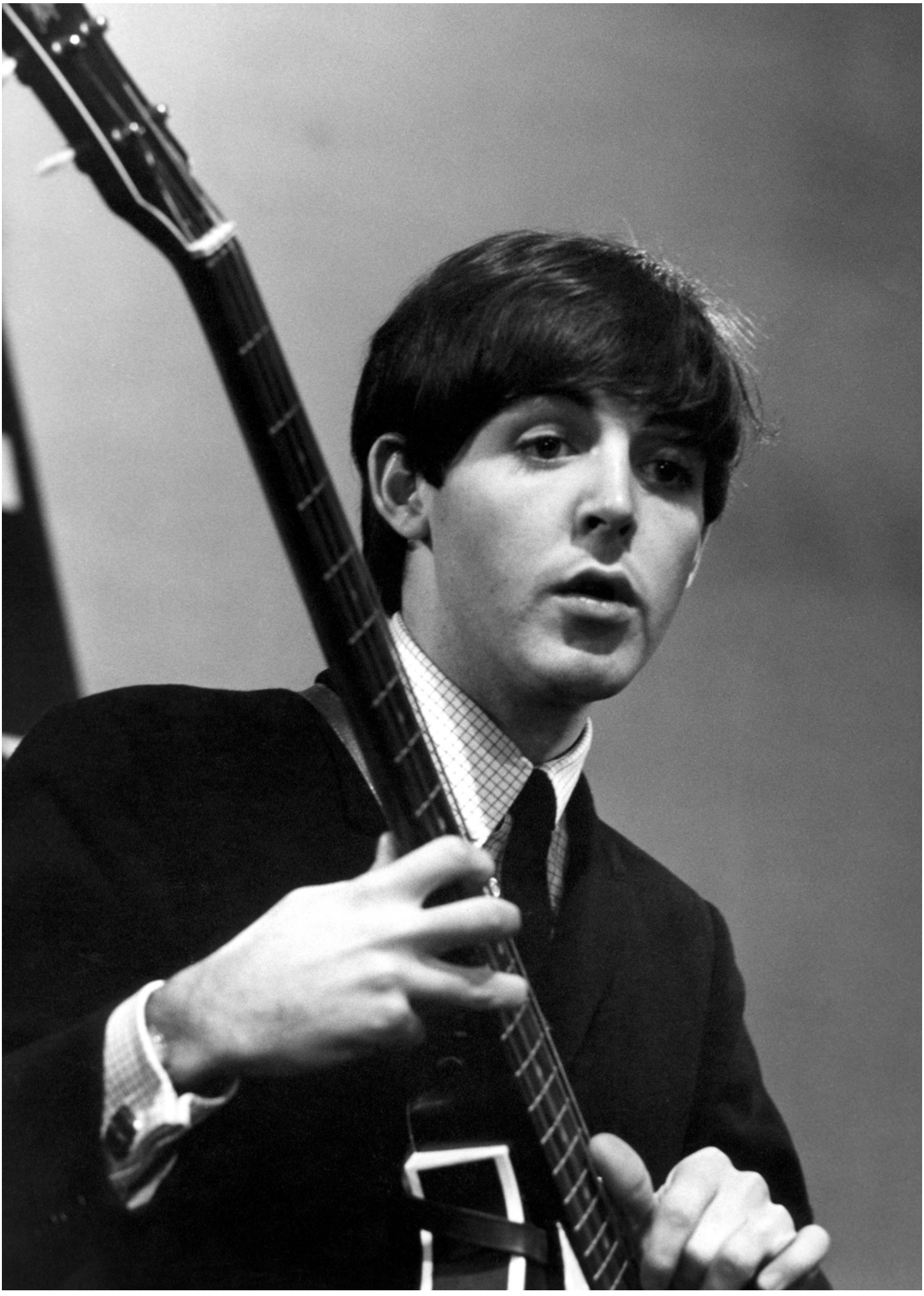
"I picked that one up because I thought it would be kinda clever, what with all the comparisons between myself and Dave," he grins. "I later realised it was a kind of stupid idea. But the guitar itself is amazing in front of a mic... all it needs is a bit of teasing." And one guitar player's dreams came true when Martin decided that were going to bring out a John Mayer signature model – essentially a herringbone OM-28 with an Engelmann spruce top, Indian rosewood back and sides and Fishman/Martin electronics.

IN THE WOOD

"There's no doubt in my mind that Martin have perfected making acoustic guitars. I didn't want a signature model because they hadn't already made one I was happy with," states Mayer. "When they offered me the opportunity, it was almost like an art project! I love the OM design, but I wanted to have a narrower neck and few other thing incorporated into it. There were hours and hours of conversation, with specs sheets going back and forth... I just wanted to take all my favourite elements of all the Martin guitars and put them together.

"But, you know, some guitars somehow give you the feeling that you're just about to write your best-ever song, or play the best you've ever played. And that isn't anything to do with neck width or pickup configuration – every guitar sounds different, and they dictate the way you write songs. That's why I'm so interested in the guitar as an instrument. I believe that every guitar has a sweet spot, and if you find that sweet spot then you're going to come up with something that people will want to hear. It's that simple."

Mayer at the 2014 Music Midtown Festival in Atlanta, Georgia



PAUL MCCARTNEY

HE'S A HOUSEHOLD NAME AND A CULTURAL ICON, BUT PAUL MCCARTNEY IS STILL IN LOVE WITH MAKING MUSIC. OVER 30 YEARS SINCE HE FIRST HIT NO. 1 WITH THE BEATLES, PAUL TALKS ABOUT THEIR RECORDINGS, HIS EVOLUTION AS A BASS PLAYER, HIS SOLO WORK AND THE FAB FOUR'S GEAR IN THIS SEPTEMBER 1993 INTERVIEW…

Words MARK CUNNINGHAM

In 1991, exactly 30 years after becoming a bass player through necessity, Paul McCartney was honoured with *Rolling Stone* magazine's Best Bassist Of The Year award. It was a title bestowed on him almost habitually throughout the 60s and 70s… but in the 90s? McCartney typically shies away from such tributes. A few years ago, when asked if he ever had doubts about his playing, Macca replied: "Definitely. Often! Probably every time I've done a bass part."

Yet McCartney's contributions to the bass guitar – and of course, popular music – are truly outstanding. He is, of course, the man synonymous with the Höfner 500/1 Violin Bass and it was his recent songwriting collaborator, Elvis Costello, who encouraged Macca to bring his trademark instrument out of retirement when they were working on Costello's *Spike* album. The one he now uses is the same one from the last Beatles tour, with the original setlist still Sellotaped to the side!

Originally a rhythm guitarist and occasional pianist, Paul assumed the role of bassist when Stuart Sutcliffe quit The Beatles in mid 1961 to pursue an art career. McCartney bought his first Höfner – a violin-shaped hollowbody instrument in a shaded brown finish, with pickups in the neck and middle positions and a 30-inch, short scale length – on one of The Beatles' early trips to Hamburg.

"I'd gone out there with a red Rosetti Solid 7, which was a real crappy guitar, but looked quite good," McCartney says. "Stuart Sutcliffe was leaving the band and he wanted to stay in Hamburg, so we had to have a bass player. So I got elected bass player, or lumbered as the case may be.

"I got my Violin Bass at the Steinway shop in the town centre. I remember going along and there was this bass which was quite cheap. It cost the German Mark equivalent of £30 or so – my dad had always hammered into us never to get into debt because we weren't that rich.

"John and George went easily in debt and got beautiful guitars: John got a Club 40 and George had a Futurama – which is like a Fender copy – and then, later, Gretsches," Paul recalls. "Then John got the Rickenbackers. They were prepared to use hire-purchase credit, but it had been so battered into me not to do that, I wouldn't risk it. So I bought a cheap guitar. And once I bought it, I fell in love with it. That's why I'm using it again now. For a light, dinky little bass, it has a very rich sound."

UPSIDE DOWN

It's surely one of the most recognisable instruments in rock and, with the dawn of Beatlemania, demand for the Violin Bass grew to the stage where the Höfner factory in Bubenreuth, Germany was unable to keep up. But while so many guitar and bass players of the 50s and 60s were influenced by other artists in their choice of instrument, Paul had little option.

"To tell you the truth, it was because I was left-handed. Every guitar I ever used had to be right-handed, because back then, they didn't make special left-handers, so I used to turn them upside down. But the violin shape was symmetrical, so it didn't look quite as stupid as some of the others did – for instance, when their cutaways were on the upside.

"I think that Höfner was one of the first companies with any decent instruments, not only the Violin Bass, but also their guitars. Obviously, my big influence was bass, but John and George had the guitars and, even though they weren't as good as, say, Fenders or Gibsons, they had a great, distinctive sound. I like it a lot – you play a lot faster, very easily. Its main problem is in the inaccuracy of the tuning when you get up the neck a bit. We've done a little bit of work on it – more

on the bridge and stuff, because of the tuning problems – but not a lot. It's still basically original; it's still the same instrument."

Paul's earliest bass amp was a Truvoice, but by the time of The Beatles' EMI recording auditions in the summer of 1962, he'd switched to Vox amplification – a 60-watt T-60 piggyback bass amp with one 12-inch and one 15-inch speaker. In late 1963, Paul then picked up a newer version of the Höfner 500/1. It was essentially the same bass, but the centrally located pickup was now in the bridge position. Selmer, Höfner's UK distributor, presented him with a gold-plated 500/1 in March 1964, when he was using a new Vox 100-watt bass amp with his T-60 speaker enclosure – his standard setup through to the end of 1965. Sadly, says Paul, the gold Höfner was "one of a few instruments stolen from us at the time".

By his early 20s, Paul had become proficient on a number of instruments. It therefore comes as no surprise that he was the first Beatle to escape the restrictions of his allotted instrument to play lead guitar on a surprisingly high number of Fab tracks. In 1964, he bought a Sunburst Epiphone Casino fitted with a Bigsby vibrato tailpiece. Both George and John followed suit shortly after.

Paul first used this guitar for the *Ticket To Ride* solo fills, the slide parts on *Drive My Car* and the manic *Taxman* solo, which gave more than a passing nod to Harrison's growing fascination with all things Eastern. Paul refutes the suggestion that such displays of versatility may have aggravated his fellow Fabs. "If ever I had an idea for a solo, I'd just play it to them. The others were normally very supportive, so I just went for it! I liked *Taxman* just because of what it was. I was very inspired by Jimi Hendrix and it was really my first voyage into feedback. George was generally a little more restrained in his guitar playing, he wasn't into heavy feedback. I don't think George was too miffed. But when people say: 'Great solo on Taxman,' I don't think he's too pleased to have to say: 'Well, that was Paul, actually!'. I didn't really do much like that – just once or twice."

> "IF EVER I HAD AN IDEA FOR A SOLO, I'D JUST PLAY IT TO THEM. THE OTHERS WERE NORMALLY VERY SUPPORTIVE"

The Höfner's symmetry was a factor for the left-handed McCartney

RICKY TO RIDE

Rubber Soul marked the beginning of a major turning point in Paul's bass style. For many of the sessions, he took along his new Rickenbacker bass, a Fireglo 4001S which he had been offered the previous year, but turned down because of its weight. Paul took delivery of it between The Beatles' 1965 Hollywood Bowl appearances, and his basslines started to take on a new personality, becoming more melodic, more complex yet more fluid than before, particularly on *Nowhere Man*.

"The Rickenbacker was very nice, it recorded better. It had a sort of fatter neck, and it was much more stable – didn't go out of tune as easily. Also, it stayed in tune right up the neck; the Höfner had problems when you got right up near the top, so I hardly ever went up there.

"Although some of the stuff in *Paperback Writer* is the Höfner, so it did actually stay in tune for that. But it was a little more difficult to work with, being a cheaper instrument. I guess you pay for that precision."

George Harrison's *Think For Yourself* was adorned with one of the first, if not the first, examples of fuzz bass – the searing rasp courtesy of a Gary Hurst/Vox Tone Bender fuzz box. Photographs from these sessions reveal that other off-the-wall bass experiments at this time included the use of a capo on at least one track. Although the Rickenbacker was beginning to come to the fore, Paul's Höfner was still the only bass used onstage right up until The Beatles' final concerts in 1966, when he used a variety of Vox amps, depending on the venue.

BASS BOOST

The mid 60s were formative years for Paul McCartney. His wider understanding of all manner of musical styles, prompted by the wisdom and encouragement of producer George Martin, led to a greater appreciation of what could be achieved with regular instrumentation, particularly the bass guitar. "On the early recordings, you didn't really hear the bass that much, but I started changing style and became more melodic. Brian Wilson was a big influence – strange, really, because he's not known as a bass man. *God Only Knows* was a great example. If you listen to *Pet Sounds*, there's a very interesting bass – it's nearly always offbeat..."

And did George Martin contribute to the composition of any of Paul's basslines? "No, not really. I used to stay behind at the studio after the others had left and work out the bass parts for the following day's session. I'll never forget putting the bassline to *Michelle*, because

McCartney with Höfner and Lennon with refinished Ricky 325 on the set of *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964, at the CBS TV studios in Manhattan

it was a kind of Bizet thing. It really turned the song around. You could do that with bass, it was very exciting. The basslines on *Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds* and *With A Little Help From My Friends* were good, too. And yes, the bass became more important – we were listening to records in the discos that had more bass."

George Martin's engineer sidekick, Geoff Emerick, recalls how: "*Paperback Writer* was the first time the bass sound had been heard in all its excitement. For a start, Paul played a different bass, a Rickenbacker, then we boosted it even further by using a loudspeaker as a microphone. We positioned it directly in front of the bass speaker and the moving diaphragm of the second spacer made the electric current."

Engineer Tony Clark had the task of cutting the *Paperback Writer* lacquer. He remembers how: "When I cut it, with all that bass, EMI were very worried about releasing a single like that, in case the stylus jumped!" Paul affirms how "EMI had very firm rules about that, which we always had to break. It wasn't a wilful arrogance, we just felt we knew better. 'What do you mean we can't have bass? I was down the disco last night and I heard a record with that kind of bass!'. They'd say: 'Well our rule book says…' and we'd say: 'They're out of date, come on, let's move!'… We were always pushing ahead – louder, further, longer, more, different!" The sessions which spawned *Sgt. Pepper's*… in 1967 saw the studio floor at Abbey Road strewn with new, exotic instruments, some of which were prototypes given to the band to try out.

Bass-wise, Paul stuck to his Rickenbacker, now painted in a swirling psychedelic design, and used both his Casino and a new Sunburst Fender Esquire – through a Selmer amp – for guitar parts, the latter for his powerful *Good Morning Good Morning* solo.

Paul's Epiphone Casino is one of several guitars he has salvaged over the years, and he still finds use for it today. As one can imagine, a vast number of guitars and basses have floated in Paul's direction since The Beatles, but unlike some of his contemporaries, he is not one to flaunt his collection. He prefers to keep his working instruments to a bare minimum, keeping the rest safely in storage.

Towards the end of the Fab Four's career, the productions were becoming simpler, less effects-oriented and at times, completely live. It was not unusual for the other Beatles to pick up the bass duties – often using either a Sunburst Fender Jazz or six-string Fender Bass VI with a Fender Bassman amp – while Paul played either guitar, piano or drums, such as on *Back In The U.S.S.R.* and *Let It Be*. In 1969, McCartney returned to his Höfner for the *Let It Be* film cameras, reminding us of its distinctive bottom end. "I noticed a clip of me in the *Let It Be* rooftop sequence, and you know you play differently when the instrument itself isn't heavy. You're tempted to play more melodic riffs and more kind of 'guitar' parts, really. I think its tone, for a little lightweight bass, is incredible, because it really sounds like a string bass sometimes."

Recorded between February and August 1969, the band's penultimate release before their split, *Abbey Road*, featured a welcome return to the melodic McCartney basslines of *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*. His runs on *Something* and *Sun King* often resembled woolly, low-register guitar solos, achieved through careful use of the Rickenbacker's string mutes. *Old Brown Shoe*, the Harrison number recorded in the early stages of those

McCartney plays an impromptu gig in a 300-capacity venue during the One On One Tour in Pioneertown, California in 2016

sessions, was treated with similar McCartney enthusiasm, his bubbling riff double-tracked note-perfectly with George's Leslie-d guitar. However, the band's signing-off piece, *The End*, was equally significant for its spectacular lead guitar triumvirate, on which Paul used his Casino to battle with Lennon's Gibson ES-335 and Harrison's rosewood Telecaster.

LIFE AFTER HÖFNER

After the untidy break-up of The Beatles, and throughout most of the Wings period, Paul continued to play the same Rickenbacker 4001S bass used on many of the post-1965 Beatles recordings. The main exceptions being his employment of a Fender Jazz bass for some of the 1973 Band On The Run sessions in Lagos, and a one-off left-handed Yamaha for Wings' final album *Back To The Egg* in 1979.

The latter included the mammoth *Rockestra Theme* – a pre-Live Aid gathering of rock luminaries which saw McCartney compete for bass space with Led Zep's John Paul Jones, the Faces' Ronnie Lane and Bruce Thomas of The Attractions. Further instrument diversions in the 70s included the original stand-up bass belonging to Bill Black (Elvis Presley's bass player), which wife Linda bought as a present for Paul in the mid-to-late-70s. He returned the gesture by playing it on her own Wings rock 'n' roll number, *Cook Of The House*.

It is interesting to note that while Paul stuck mainly to Vox amplification in the 60s, his 70s bass rigs changed regularly, from tour to tour. John Hammel, McCartney's personal assistant since The Beatles split, reliably confirmed: "When Wings started touring in '72 and '73, Paul was using an Acoustic 360 bass rig and Vox amps for guitar. But the '75/'76 world tour was another matter. He had a pretty sizeable rig there, with two Crown 300A amps and an Audio Master preamp, and these drove a set of JBL speakers, a Roy Clare 2x12 midrange bin and JBL horns. Later, for the last UK tour in 1979, Paul switched to using 120-watt Fender Bassmans and three 4x12 cabinets with angled speakers. Back then, he was also playing the occasional number on his Casino through Vox AC30s, and he's back to using them again on the current tour."

A live recreation of the aforementioned *Rockestra Theme* at London's Hammersmith Odeon in December '79 signified his last stage appearance with Wings.

"Being my first band after The Beatles, Wings was always going to be a tough cookie. I don't think any band would have felt quite up to it. Once or twice, you know, we had a few arguments and stuff, like: 'I don't like the way you do that' and... ooh, friction! Jimmy McCulloch was a great guy, a great little player, but such an erratic personality, if you want to put it nicely. Whenever we did have an argument, it was amplified because they were all so insecure. Inevitably, there were quite a few line-ups! It was all a bit crazy, in a kind of 'Spinal Tap' way for me. For some reason, we turned into aggressive, crazy people during Wings."

> "I COULD'VE HAD ERIC CLAPTON IN WINGS. HE'S TOLD ME IF I'D ASKED HIM HE WOULD HAVE JOINED ME IMMEDIATELY"

Indeed, the only other constant member of Wings was Paul's wife Linda, who now qualifies as Macca's longest standing musical collaborator. "I could have had Eric Clapton in the band," he reveals. "He's told me since that if I'd asked him he would have joined me immediately, but I wanted Linda, because I wanted to be with her. That's the way it was in the old days. You didn't have fantastically trained musicians around you, you just had a bunch of guys you wanted to hang out with. I know there's that thing that Mick Jagger said about 'I wouldn't have my old lady on stage', but she's there, Mick, because I want her to be. That's why. I don't have to let Mick Jagger tell me what I can and cannot do."

OLD FAITHFUL

Following Wings' demise, McCartney found himself without a regular band for almost a full decade, leaning on the support of George Martin, Ringo Starr, Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, 10cc's Eric Stewart and, surprisingly, jazz-bass legend Stanley Clarke, to help him in the studio.

While McCartney was inevitably crafting good tunes, the majority of his albums from this period lacked continuity. His bass playing, however, though generally not as upfront as before, was still as impeccable as ever.

McCartney plays the Coachella Festival in Palm Desert, California in 2009

The Beatles on Granada TV's *Late Scene Extra* in Manchester in 1963

Studio-based throughout the 80s, Paul returned to his faithful old Rickenbacker, occasionally using a fretless model as well as Fenders. Still preferring the plectrum to the naked thumb or finger, his riffs were finding a new voice – grittier, smoother, but every bit as structured as his previous work.

He still had not returned to the musical stage in earnest since 1979. "The simple reason was that I didn't have a band," Paul explains. "I was much more nervous about playing the Prince's Trust concert than Live Aid. I only had half an hour to get the songs together with Elton and the rest of 'em before the doors opened. I remember Tina Turner sitting in the front row, watching me rehearse all these old numbers and it started me thinking about getting another regular band together. I'd pinpoint that night as the one that broke my stage fright – one that turned me around."

So in 1989, after much friendly jamming and veiled auditioning, Paul announced the line-up of his new band: guitarists Robbie McIntosh and Hamish Stuart, keyboard player Paul 'Wix' Wickens, Linda on keyboards and drummer Chris Whitten (now replaced by Blair Cunningham).

Flowers In The Dirt, the album which heralded this apparent renaissance, was notable in the bass department for the appearance of Paul's customised five-string Wal bass. "Trevor Horn, who produced some of the tracks, came into the studio one day with his Wal bass – I liked the feel of it and I just had to have one. So I was using it quite often until this tour."

HERE TODAY

Popular opinion has it that the McCartney output since the advent of this new band has been his best since The Beatles. Then again, Paul has joked that: "I'm the poor bastard who always has to compete with The Beatles!". Certainly, songs like the thunderous *C'mon People*, *Get Out Of My Way* and *Mistress And Maid* have a clearer direction, and two years on the road helped inspire the more spontaneous approach to *Off The Ground*.

> MCCARTNEY HAS JOKED: "I'M THE POOR B*****D WHO ALWAYS HAS TO COMPETE WITH THE BEATLES!"

And with his world tour touching down in Britain this month, it's reassuring to hear that McCartney still has a refreshing philosophy for playing live. "If you can play your stuff in a pub, then you're a good band."

At the time of writing, Paul is busy at his private East Sussex studio, mixing tapes from recent Australasian and US concerts for a forthcoming live album. With the (heavy) Wal now relegated to the subs' bench, Paul's faithful Höfner has once again become his mainstay, as he turns full circle in this 30th-anniversary year of Beatlemania. So what keeps him on the road?

"It's the audience, because when you write and produce a record, you do it in isolation – you even hear it on the radio in isolation. But when you get out in front of a crowd and they like something, it's very obvious, because they'll cheer or clap or weep or smile. You get the feedback and that's the payoff. They say that showbiz people like applause, but I think everyone does. It's like your boss saying: 'That's great, that's fantastic.' It's an affirmation that you're okay.

"The only thing that's ever motivated me – ever – has been a love of the music... The only difference between the audiences then and now is that they dress differently. But it's still pretty crazy. The crowds seem to behave like their mothers and fathers did in the 60s – and I still love 'em!"

YAMAHA

GARY MOORE

On the eve of the gig of a lifetime – supporting BB King on his latest UK tour – Belfast's leading blues export takes time out to talk to us about the music that changed his life in this June 2006 interview...

Words JULIAN PIPER

"That first lick just changed my life!" Gary Moore laughs as he recalls the first time that John Mayall's Bluesbreakers hit the turntable of his Dansette record player and he heard Eric Clapton's slashing introduction to *All Your Love*.

"It was the first thing I'd ever heard in the blues world, and when Eric played that lick, that was it. I just thought: 'Yeah – that's what I want to do!'. I'd been playing for three or four years, but that track just grabbed me by the throat and said: 'That's it – you're coming in here'. There was so much passion and emotion in it. It was almost a physical thing; you could really feel the guitar as well as hear it. Even on my dinky little record player, that sound just jumped right out of the speakers... probably because it was in mono."

There's something very endearing about hearing Gary Moore still talking so enthusiastically about his personal musical epiphany. Love him or hate him – and just the mention of his name can often inspire these extremes of emotion among guitar aficionados – there's no getting away from the fact that if they issued a medal for long service to the cause of the blues, Gary Moore would have no trouble qualifying.

After releasing his phenomenally successful *Still Got The Blues* album in 1990, a string of albums followed with cameo appearances by blues legends Albert King, BB King and Albert Collins. Paying homage to the music that first inspired him when he was still a young lad back in Belfast – he was born there in 1952 – he helped introduce a whole new generation of listeners and guitarists alike to a music they might not have otherwise have discovered.

BLUES IN BELFAST

When we caught up with Gary shortly before he was about to embark on a short UK tour supporting BB King, he began by reminiscing about those early days on the wild frontier that was the Belfast blues scene of the 60s.

"There was a lot of blues in town. Rory Gallagher had moved up there when I was growing up, and Van Morrison, who was older than me, had just left with his band Them," Gary recalls. "Rory and I used to link our amps up together and leave our guitars onstage for each other because we couldn't afford any spare strings! I've got a lot of fond memories about one club called The Prado... I saw John Mayall play there, and the early Fleetwood Mac. But Belfast was a tough town back then; you had to really love music to take your life in your hands and go out at night."

These days Gary talks with a soft, barely recognisable Belfast burr, a result presumably of all his long ex-patriot years spent in England. He moved here at the age of 17, playing guitar with young rock hopefuls Skid

Playing Rotterdam in 1992, with his Midnight Blues Band

With Scott Gorham In Thin Lizzy, the band Moore played in a number of times throughout his career

Row, with a Marshall combo that he would perch on a chair at gigs. But by the sounds of things, it was a good move.

"When you played at The Prado there would be gangs outside waiting to try and mug the musicians and beat them up; you had to run this gauntlet every time you came out! There was one guy who used to keep a hatchet up his jacket – there were a few psychos around. But that was how it was, and that was before the so-called 'Troubles' started up for real; it was a tough scene and not for the faint-hearted. Belfast's okay now, but the last time I played there a couple of years back, there was some guy calling out: 'Hey Gary – play The Sash', which is the Orangemen's tune. I didn't think that would be very clever. You'd get yourself shot by the other lot," he says, ruefully.

RARE BLUES

In common with most of his generation, Gary found it almost impossible to find records by obscure blues artists, let alone hear their music. As a result, it was the supercharged versions of Freddie King and Otis Rush tunes played by the Les Paul-wielding heroes of the Mayall bands that first caught his attention. It's an infatuation that has lasted throughout his career, and releases such as *Blues For Greeny* – his homage to Peter Green – show just how much their influence shaped much of the music he's produced ever since.

"I gradually started hearing the black players, but it was mostly secondhand, through players like Peter Green – who was into BB King – and Albert King through hearing Mick Taylor play," Gary remembers. "But looking back, I think that it was a really good way to hear the music... all those guys were really good players in their own right.

"The first time I heard Albert King was him playing this track called *Cold Feet* coming out of my mum's teeny little radio on the fireplace. I just thought: 'Shit, what is that?'," Gary exclaims. "Albert was playing this fantastic guitar and just talking through it... I'd never heard anything like that, and it made me realise that there was so much music around that I hadn't heard. Then Jimi Hendrix came along and blew the whole thing wide open. It was a good time to be learning the guitar and all the great players who were around at that time were rooted in the blues, which would make it strange if I didn't have that kind of influence, too."

"IT WAS A GOOD TIME TO BE LEARNING THE GUITAR: ALL THE GREAT PLAYERS WERE ROOTED IN THE BLUES"

And there are few players who can boast Gary Moore's startling musical CV, a career which has encompassed everything from the jazz/rock fusion of Colosseum II to the flat-out stadium rock of Thin Lizzy and later adventures into his Celtic roots. With so many diverse influences, it's hardly surprising that Gary momentarily lost direction.

"I think maybe I was distracted for a while," he readily agrees, "but I also learned a lot from playing with people like Jon Hiseman; when you play different styles, you can always learn from it, but take it back to whatever you might have been doing in the first place. Musicians of that calibre – and of course Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, who I played with in BBM – are bound to teach you something that will improve your playing."

BRING IT ON HOME

When Gary eventually rediscovered his blues roots in 1990, he could not have chosen a better time. In America, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Robert Cray were going from strength to strength (up until the former's tragic demise), and bands like The Fabulous Thunderbirds

Gary Moore moved from primarily Strat-style guitars in his rock era to Les Pauls for his bluesier playing

and Los Angeles-based Chicano rockers Los Lobos were reawakening the interest of comatose audiences with a new, earthier approach to playing music. "I was so sick of that whole 80s thing and increasingly found myself like a fish out of water in the rock world," Gary readily admits. "I never felt completely at home; I wanted to play more melodic songs and play in my own way.

"As it was, I felt trapped by the whole production element and the ridiculous circus you had to take out on the road, with a production meeting every two days; I was worrying more about the stage set than the music! It all seemed very superficial and when I found myself playing blues more and more, it sent a clear message to me – it was time to stop messing around and to go back to something I really believed in. It was time to go back home."

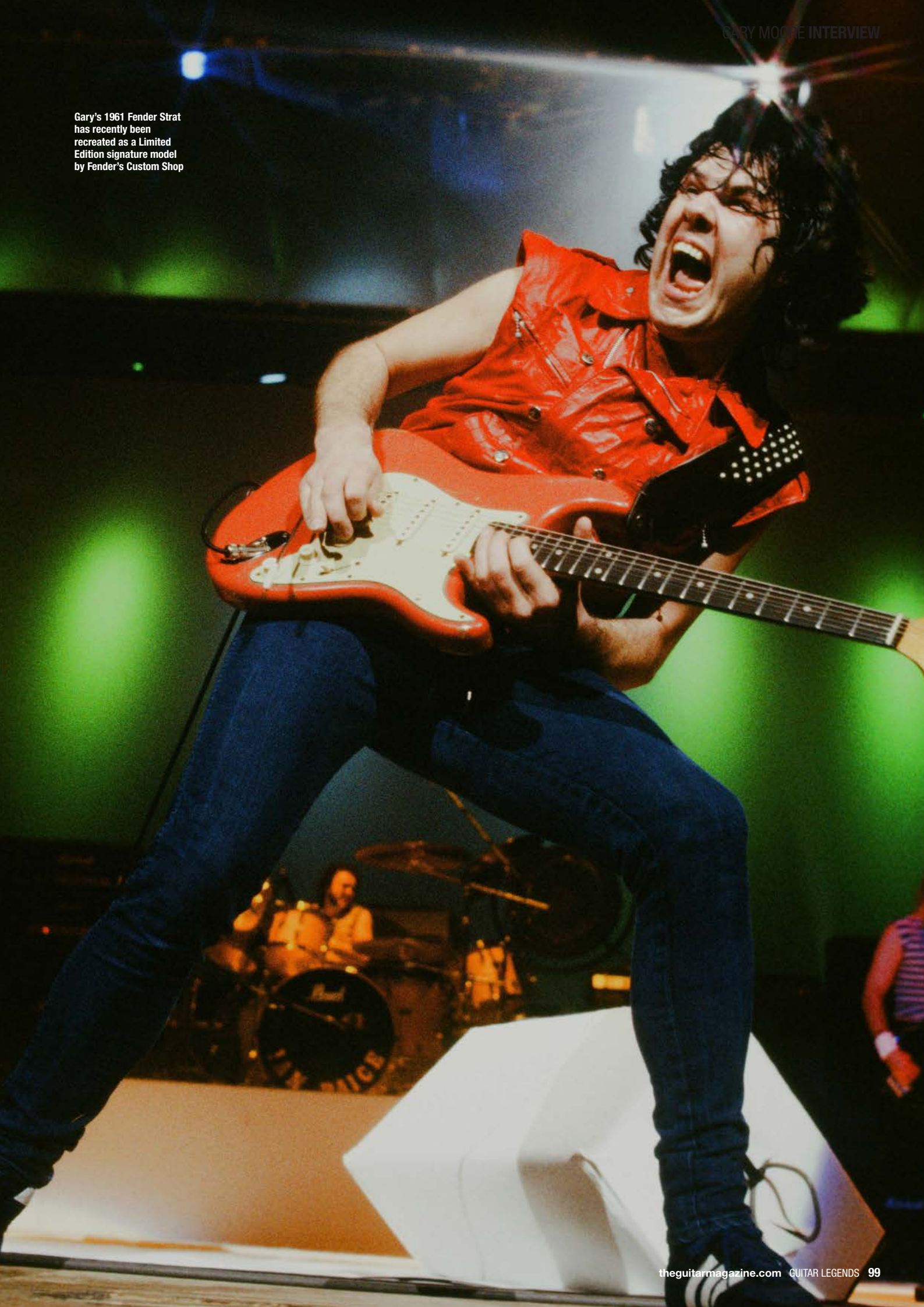
KING ALBERT

Gary's first collaboration on *Still Got The Blues* was with Albert King, a player with a fearsome reputation for not suffering fools gladly, particularly when it came to upstart young pretenders to his throne. "I recorded a version of *Oh, Pretty Woman* and asked Albert King if he would play; I didn't think that he'd want do it, but someone managed to talk him into it and he flew over from the States," recalls Gary. "But I had a recurring nightmare, because I knew one of the words in the song wasn't right – I just couldn't tell what it was from the original record. I worried that he would pick up on it, and of course it happened straight away. "Albert said: 'Well, what have you got?'. We put on *Oh, Pretty Woman* and on the second line, he said: 'Stop the tape!', looked at me and said: 'Hear that line there, boy? It's "sure is the rising sun", not "she's the rising sun".' All night long, he kept ribbing me, looking over his glasses at me like an old headmaster and giving me shit – and not just about the lyrics, either! He didn't like the keyboards, the drumming was wrong, I was playing too many notes...

"HE KEPT RIBBING ME, LOOKING OVER HIS GLASSES AT ME LIKE AN OLD HEADMASTER AND GIVING ME ST"**

"But it turned out great and he liked my playing," Gary recalls, almost in disbelief. "He just wanted to establish his authority; from the moment he walked in, he just wanted everyone to know that he was Albert King. It was going to be his way and that was the way it was going to be. He was really very sweet, and after dinner you'd sit down and he'd just keep you amused with all these amazing stories..."

On his new album *Old New Ballads Blues*, Gary has re-recorded what has almost become his anthem: Otis Rush's *All Your Love*. This song, it seems, just will not go away – and neither will Gary Moore's enthusiasm for blues. "One of the things I love about people like BB King is that they're all completely devoted to the music," he says in parting. "Completely serious. They work so hard at getting it right; they're not just a bunch of blaggers who picked up the guitar one day and thought: 'Yeah, this'll do.' They all put so much into it – not like rock musicians at all."



Gary's 1961 Fender Strat has recently been recreated as a Limited Edition signature model by Fender's Custom Shop

JOE PERRY

He's the face that launched a thousand riffs – and in this 2002 interview, Joe Perry tells us how Boston's Aerosmith have sailed through 30 choppy, controversial and hit-packed years in the business and still wear the crown of America's Greatest Rock 'N' Roll Band...

Words NICK BOWCOTT

"Joe Perry?" ponders Slash. "He was a huge influence on me. In fact, it was Aerosmith that inspired me to start playing guitar in the first place... Hell, they even distracted me from the hottest chick in my junior high! I'd finally gotten over at her place after chasing her for months and she put *Rocks* on. It was the first time I'd ever heard it and I totally forgot about her. I ignored her completely and just kept playing the album over and over. She eventually walked out of the room and I split. that's how much of an impact Aerosmith had on me."

Aerosmith have had a bit of an impact all over. they were recently inducted into the prestigious Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, MTV has crowned them 'Icons' and Disney has built an incredibly popular rollercoaster ride around them. they've done TV adverts for Gap; the press considers them to be America's finest-ever rock band; their peers respect them, the public loves them and they've sold tens of millions of albums. they've experienced the highest highs and the lowest lows of the music business, they've been around since 1970 and are still going strong.

Guitarist Joe Perry has his own unique style. "He's a great riff writer and has a wonderful head for catchy licks that are always different to what anybody else would do," Slash continues. "Joe also comes from that school of 'beat the shit out of your guitar'. The only two guys who have ever put out a record that has that kind of fuckin' cruelty to an instrument are Joe Perry and Pete Townshend – they both have a real sense of aggro that I really dig. They're both really great players who just instinctively know how to throw all the fucking sloppiness in the right places.

"Granted, Joe's gotten a little more fine-tuned over the years, but in Aerosmith's early touring days during the mid 70s, there was a lot of brilliant noise coming out of them and a lot of it was due to his 'wham bam'

Joe Perry at the O2 Arena, London, in 2010 in London with one of his dizzying array of Les Pauls

guitar style," Slash concludes. "Plus, all things considered, Joe's still the coolest-looking guitar player around! He's always had the coolest image."

WHAT IT TAKES

Praise indeed, especially coming from a fellow rawk-axeman of Slash's high standing. This summer Aerosmith released *O, Yeah! Ultimate Aerosmith Hits*, a double 'best of' CD that celebrates their incredibly long and successful career. On the eve of commencing a huge, enormo-dome tour of America (with rap pioneers Run-DMC and Kid Rock) to promote the album, we cornered Mr Perry to pick his brains on a few points.

For a start, as you may already know, there are currently five 'Best Of Aerosmith'-type offerings available – seven, if you include the *Live Classics* pair. So does the world really need another Aerosmith hits compilation? As it turns out, it does, because, believe it or not, up until this one, the band has had no say whatsoever in the track selection. "As strange as that might sound, that's true... I mean, I didn't even know *Young Lust* existed until a fan asked me to sign a copy!"

Even though the double disc format of *O, Yeah!...* allowed the band to squeeze 30 songs on it (28 oldies and two brand-new tracks, *Girls Of Summer* and *Lay It Down*), when your back catalogue consists of 13 studio albums, the choice of which tracks to include couldn't have been an easy one. "Thank God for fax machines!" Perry laughs. "Actually, it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. We've been having a much tougher time putting the new setlist together for the tour... We originally wanted to make the album just 12 songs and then we were ready to pull our hair out, so 30 songs made it a little easier. The record company put together a wish-list that had something like 40 songs on it, so we went down it and compared it to our setlists from the last couple of years and everything kind of became clear.

"I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THE YOUNG LUST [BEST OF] EXISTED UNTIL A FAN ASKED ME TO SIGN A COPY!"

"There were a bunch of songs that were the obvious ones and then we just basically looked at our setlist and said: 'What songs are considered Aerosmith hits by our fans?' And sometimes they're not necessarily ones that were Top 10 singles – or even released as singles – but they're still definite hits from the live point of view.

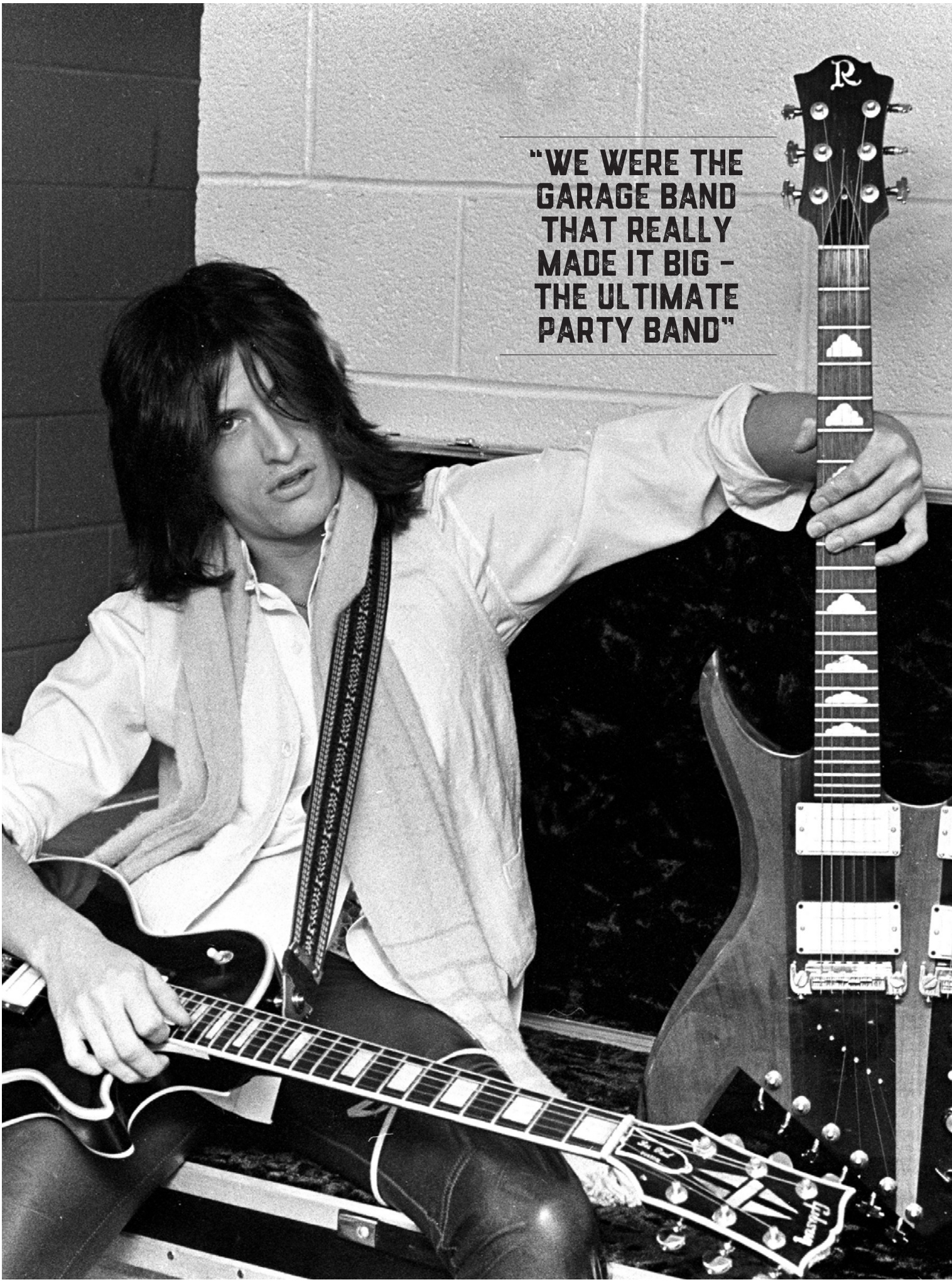
"The inclusion of *Seasons Of Wither* [from *Get Your Wings*] is a good case in point. It was never really that big of a radio hit, but when we play it live, everybody responds to it. That's why, to us, it's a hit."

VINTAGE VIBE

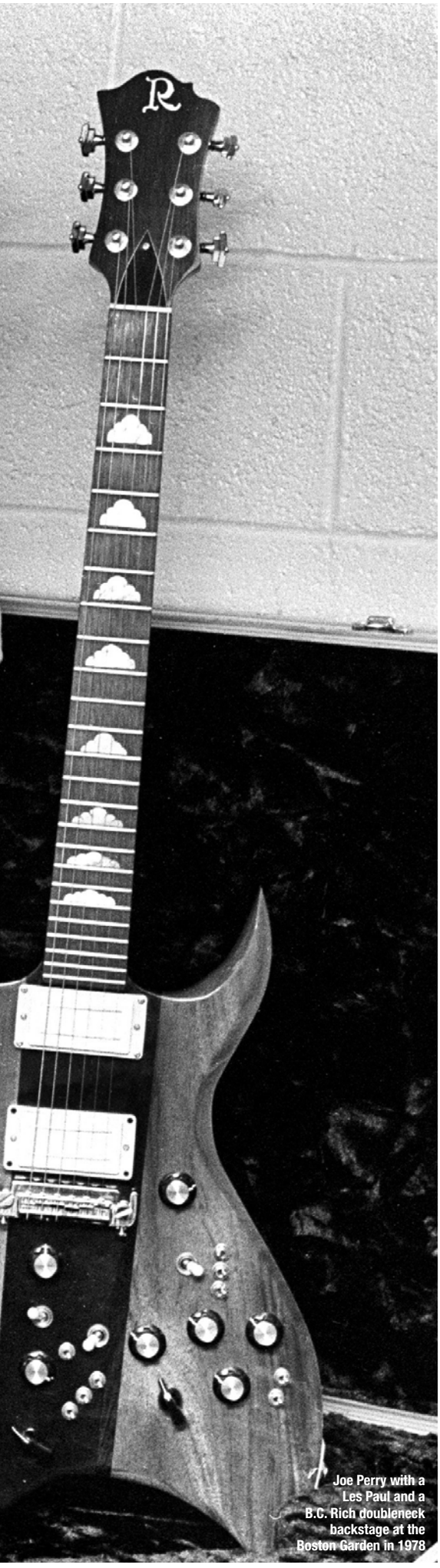
Aside from the sheer quantity of bona-fide classics that Aerosmith have under their wing, one of the most impressive things about *O, Yeah!...* is just how well the old and new material stand side-by-side from a sonic point of view. "While we've certainly experimented with technology, I still haven't lost touch with the fact that a Les Paul through a Marshall still sounds pretty good," Joe says. "I've heard some players that have supposedly refined their sound by using guitars that were custom-made for themselves or using new amps, and then I listen to some of their early recordings and I go: "What are they thinking now? Where are they going with this?" And the only thing I can think of is that their sound has lost some of its edge in their quest for more musicality, or because they're thinking: 'We did that last year, we've gotta move on'.

"With me, though, I'm always trying to get back to what the first record sounded like! That's why I go around collecting old bits of studio gear, old microphones, old amps and

Marshall



"WE WERE THE GARAGE BAND THAT REALLY MADE IT BIG – THE ULTIMATE PARTY BAND"



Joe Perry with a Les Paul and a B.C. Rich doubleneck backstage at the Boston Garden in 1978

Slash performed with Aerosmith at Jones Beach Theater in New York on their joint Let Rock Rule Tour in 2014

using them in the studio. So, even though we used Pro Tools on our last studio album, *Just Push Play*, we still went through the old Neve board and I used old Fender and Vox amps, plus the Gibson GA-30 amp that is basically a hot-rodded AC30. Basically, I try not to stray too far from what I thought was a great guitar sound when I was 17."

So would it be safe to say that 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' is the Aerosmith motto? "Kind of, yeah," Joe replies. "I mean, you always want to experiment and I definitely think my palate has broadened over the years. I mean, I've certainly gone out and used a lot of different kinds of guitar to help wrap it in a different package and help make it new. But I do like sticking close to those original things that turned me on in the first place... that's why there is kind of a linearity to our sound."

Joe once described the hard-touring Aerosmith of the 70s as: "America's band; we were the garage band that really made it big – the ultimate party band. We were the guys who you could actually see. Back then in the 70s, it wasn't like Led Zeppelin was out there on the road in America all the time. The Stones weren't always coming to your town. We were. You could count on us to come by."

Some three decades later, Aerosmith are still clearly not jaded when it comes to touring. What drives them to hit the road as often as they do?

"It's the only thing you can control," the guitarist insists. "You can't control the varying tastes of MTV or VH1 or pop radio... but you can control how good you play that night. And that's what I tell bands that come up to me and go: 'What's your advice to a new band? What's your advice to somebody starting in the business?' Rock 'n' roll is, at its best, a live medium. And, of course, coming up like we did, before all these other avenues like MTV, the internet and all that stuff, you either played live and you played good, or you didn't have a career. So, that's what got us going.

"Nowadays, maybe someone would be inspired to be an internet songwriter and that's certainly one way to go, but thankfully, there's still nothing like the feeling and the sound of a live electric guitar. And that's why I think we're seeing another whole generation of kids who are turned on by that.

"They go out there and they rock out live and they're cocky, they strut their stuff and they play loud. They're out there and their bands sound good. I think it's a case of function over flash, y'know?"

CAPTURING INSPIRATION

Along with his partner in crime, vocalist Steven Tyler, Joe Perry is responsible for penning a goodly portion of the material that has kept Aerosmith at the top of their game. How does he remember new ideas when they come up? "I have every kind of recording device in the world in my basement studio, but a cheap little cassette player with a built-in microphone has proven indispensable," Joe admits. "The only change I've made over the years is to go from cassette to MiniDisc. Nowadays, I have a little MiniDisc player with a microphone in it and I always have to know where that is. At any given moment of any given day, I have to know exactly where it is in the house because that's my catch-all, y'know? I'll never remember the stuff otherwise.

"Very often, I'll be walking from one room to another and I'll just start singing a riff or I'll think of some kind of hook in my head. As soon as that happens, I grab a guitar and put it down on MiniDisc. Usually, when I get to the point where I have two or three of those things recorded, I go downstairs in the studio with the guy who engineers down there, Paul Caruso, and we lay some things down with a basic drum machine. I know it's a little extravagant having my own studio with an engineer in my house, but that's what I do, it's my hobby. Other guys have hobbies like racing boats or cars. This is mine and I love it."

Perry at the John Varvatos 10th Annual Stuart House Benefit in LA, 2013, with his 'Billie' guitar – a customised BB King Lucille with an image of his wife painted on its maple top

Though an idea will often inspire Joe to pick up a guitar, sometimes the reverse is true and picking up a guitar will inspire an idea. "Definitely," he enthuses. "It's funny, because in my collecting of guitars over the years, I've found that every guitar is a little different – and some of them are a lot different. When you pick them up and play them they all have a different voice, and sometimes something that seems mundane and 'everyday' on one guitar might have a whole different light on it if you play it on something else. So that's one of the things I've found: by searching out odd guitars, sometimes riffs come out of them.

"They don't have to be guitars that are dear, either," he adds. "Sometimes you can pick up a $200 Supro or something and it'll have some kind of a voice to it. Maybe it was played 20 or 30 years ago and somebody left some spiritual essence in it and it's just got a riff in it ready to pop out. Sometimes when it comes to writing, it's good to take a break from playing for a while – it's easy to fall into a well-worn groove, so it's important to take a rest sometimes. Some of the best riffs I've come up with have happened when I haven't touched a guitar for a couple of weeks, so sometimes I put the guitar down on purpose for a while, to see what comes out. I just have to make sure I have my MiniDisc recorder with me when I go back to it, mind, so I can catch whatever comes out!"

> "I'VE FOUND THAT BY SEARCHING OUT ODD GUITARS, SOMETIMES RIFFS COME OUT OF THEM"

ONE RIFF TO RULE THEM ALL

Talking of riffs, of all the ones he's spawned, which one is Joe's all time favourite on the *O, Yeah!...* CD? "That's a tough one," he muses. "I really like *Draw The Line* myself. It's in a fairly common open tuning," – open G (DGDGBD, from low to high) – "that's been made famous over the years by some pretty amazing players like Ry Cooder and Keith Richards and to try and wrap a riff around it that's a little different is always exciting, y'know? It's a simple riff to play, but it's loud and powerful."

And the ultimate rock riff of all time is...? "There's so many of them," Joe says. "But, I guess if you go down the 'less is more' path, I think that *Whole Lotta Love* is the one. I mean, that opening thing – it's almost a non-riff. It's so primal that almost anybody can play it... but it's so powerful. To me, that is the epitome of simplicity and it hits the very roots of the sexual aspect of the rhythm. And, as I've said, technically, it's nothing. Jimmy Page can play just about anything and it really speaks of his genius that he was able to go: 'Okay, this is what people want to hear'."

Talking of Mr Page, Joe has often waxed lyrical on how big an influence Jimmy was on him, so how did it feel to jam with the man at Donington and then at the Marquee Club in 1990? "I always have to pinch myself whenever I'm within 10 feet of Jimmy, because over the years, he's become a good friend," Joe says. "Sometimes, we'll be sitting talking about kids or whatever and then I realise that this is they guy that did *The Song Remains The*

Aerosmith at The Meadowlands in New Jersey in 1978, sharing a bill with Ted Nugent, Journey and others

Same from top to bottom and then I've gotta go: 'Wow, this is really amazing'. It's funny – I remember being in my mother's station wagon listening to the radio and hearing that first Zeppelin record and going: 'Oh my God, this is incredible'. Then, 25 years later, I find myself playing on stage with the guy. It's an amazing path, that's all I can say."

A great deal of attention has been focused on Aerosmith's booze-and-drug-addled years in the 70s and 80s, the period which caused their dramatic descent and split in the late 70s/early 80s. This said, despite the fact that the band has been clean and sober for well over a decade, Messers Perry and Tyler still can't shake the 'Toxic Twins' nickname they earned in those bygone days. Does the fact the tag still lingers bother Joe at all? "No, I just have to chuckle when I see that stuff," he replies. "It's old news."

Some of the stories have developed lives of their own and have become urban/rock legends, such as the $80,000 room-service bill story. "That wasn't just one night, like some people try and make it out to be," Joe protests. "That was added up after a whole tour. I was pretty famous for room-service bills because my room was usually party central, so stuff usually came up by the case."

> "I WAS PRETTY FAMOUS FOR ROOM-SERVICE BILLS – MY ROOM WAS USUALLY PARTY CENTRAL"

CLEARED FOR TAKEOFF

By the time you read this, Aerosmith will be well into a lengthy US trek... but when can we expect to see them on this side of the Atlantic? "We've been talking about doing a very bluesy, roots-kind of record over the winter and then hopefully, we'll come to Europe next summer," Joe replies. "I don't think we'll make that record in the Boneyard," – the name of Joe's home studio where a good deal of *Just Push Play* was recorded – "Instead, it's probably gonna be done old-style with just the whole band in a good-sounding room with microphones on."

Will outside writers be involved, as has been the Aerosmith way since 1987's *Permanent Vacation*? "I don't think there's gonna be a process on the next one," Joe states. "I think it's just gonna be everyone blasting away with a couple of chorus lines and that's it."

With The Rolling Stones currently celebrating their 40th anniversary, what are the chances of Aerosmith still being around in 10 years time? "I dunno," Joe laughs. "10 years is a long time, but you can definitely count on us still being around in five."

Finally, let's settle a long-standing office water-cooler debate – namely the meaning of Aerosmith, and where the name came from. "There's not much of a story to tell, really," Joe shrugs. "As with a lot of bands' names, it was the one that nobody didn't like! It was okay, y'know. It's kind of a torn-up version of Arrowsmith, I guess – that's where Joey [Kramer, drums] got it from, because he had a band called Arrowsmith, named after the book," – a novel written by Sinclair Lewis in 1925. "We changed it because we were hoping we were gonna fly some day..."

KEITH RICHARDS

GUITAR HEROES DON'T COME ANY BIGGER THAN KEITH RICHARDS. IN OCTOBER 1997, WE SPOKE TO THE ETERNAL RIFF MACHINE THAT DRIVES THE GREATEST ROCK 'N' ROLL BAND IN THE WORLD ABOUT HIS SOLO RECORDS, HIS RECORDING PROCESS, HIS GEAR AND HIS TECHNIQUE FOR CORRALLING THE STONES…

Words PAUL TRYNKA

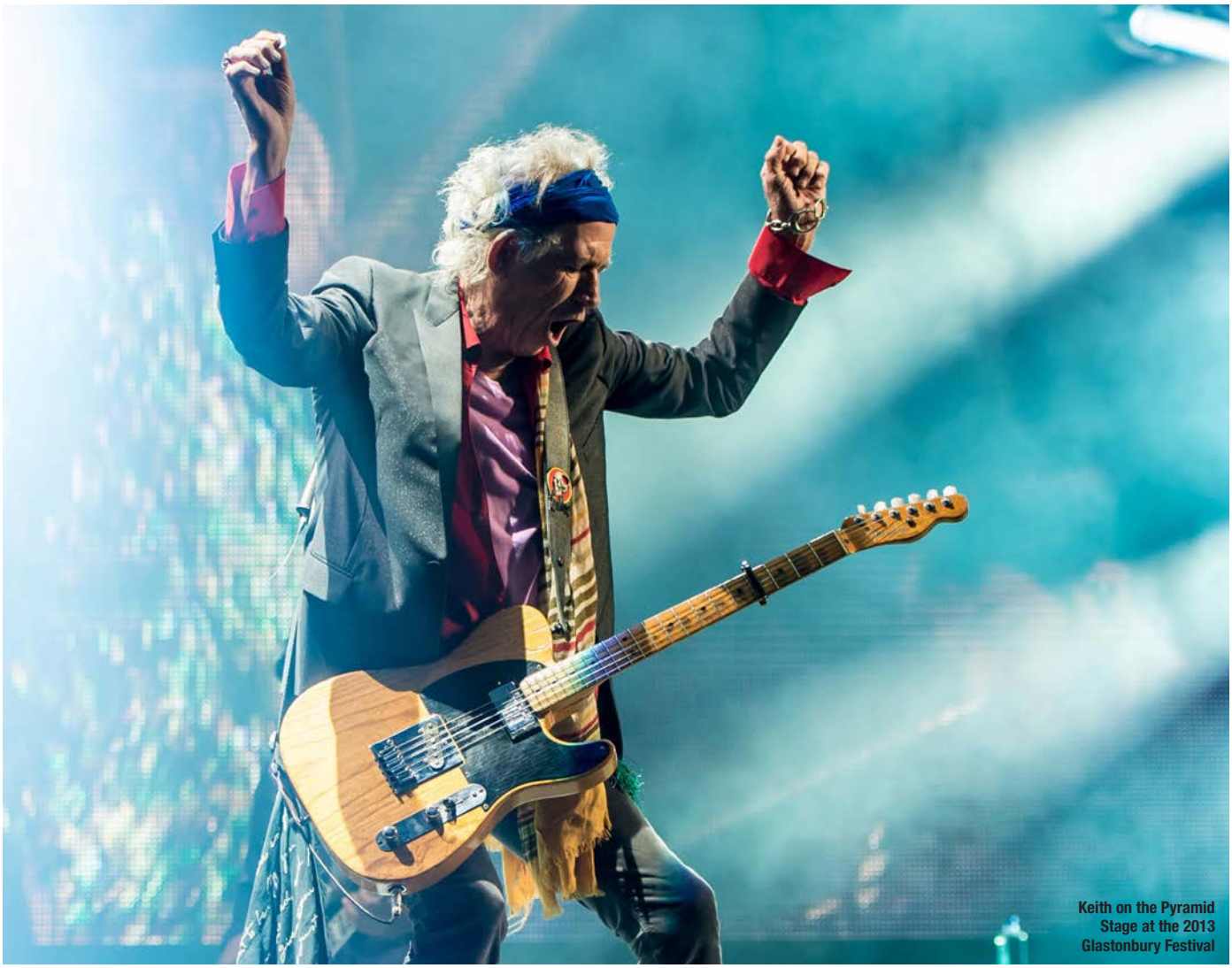
His own phrase is "five strings, two fingers, one asshole". But everyone else has their own description of the Keith Richards phenomenon: from 'the human riff' through to 'the world's most elegantly wasted human being'. Sitting after-hours in his New York headquarters, Richards displays his own distinctive brand of fitness, born out of nervous energy rather than intensive exercise. The famous lines are etched as deeply in his face as the photographs suggest – and they match perfectly the rips in his favourite denim jacket or the dents in Micawber, his beloved Tele. Keef's not knackered, he's just nicely worn-in.

His new album, *Main Offender*, proves that Keith loves making music; whether it's with the Stones, blues musicians like John Lee Hooker and Johnnie Johnson, or The X-Pensive Winos. "The main thing that's struck me about this album is how lucky I am that I've managed to get the same bunch of guys together again, because great musicians don't tend to hang around for three or four years. And they're pretty hot! There's not as many guest appearances as there are on the first one, but one of the things we figured from taking the Winos on the road is that you've got five guys there, but they all play three instruments, so you've got like 15 combinations. It rebounded on me, because I ended up playing bass again, something I haven't done since *Sympathy For The Devil* or *Let's Spend The Night Together*."

Richards has frequently said that he'd have been a drummer if he could have coordinated all four limbs, and his partnership with Steve Jordan defines the sound of the new album, just as much as his partnership with Charlie Watts delineates the elegant chaos of the Stones. The album is bright and live, permeated by the airy snap of Jordan's high-tuned snare drum, and on songs like *Hate It When You Leave* and *Demon*, Richards reminds us that he has a knack for classic, sensitive soul songs, as well as for vicious, simplistic guitar hooks like those of *999* or *Wicked As It Seems*.

SLAVE TO THE RHYTHM

Main Offender is miles away from the standard indulgence of a solo album. "In the Stones, if I stop playing, everything clatters to a halt. But these guys really push you. They're confident and they know their stuff enough not to let me slouch around. So with the Stones, I'll stop playing, go 'I can't



Keith on the Pyramid Stage at the 2013 Glastonbury Festival

remember the bridge' and they stop, because with the Stones, there's no point in going on. But the Winos will go: 'Come on Keith, pick it up!' And that's what I needed, 'cause no-one's gonna kick my arse in the Stones. I can fit in that bubble very comfortably, but maybe comfortable is not where it's at. It's one of the few times that a kick in the ass is real good!"

Richards' ability to walk in a room, snap his fingers and work out if it will prove sympathetic to live recording is well known. So it's no surprise that all the rhythm tracks for this album were laid down completely live: "We played in one room together. The drums were always in the same room. We put some amps in isolation booths, especially the bass amp, and usually slaved a small amp outside so we could still do it live. And we used a lot of ambient mics, so we had a lot of room sound.

"For studios, I'm more bothered about the room than the recording hardware, because we bring in a lot of our own equipment. Basically, I look for the room itself, how high it is, what shape it is and what kind of echo it's got. And some of the time, rooms can fool you and you think it's gonna be easy... and the first couple of days of the session, you're moving the drums around.

"But when you find the right setup, it's great. So, usually, when I start, I walk in the room and say 'Are you going to be a friend or a foe?'. "I record without headphones as much as possible – usually, the drummer has to wear them. So usually, I compromise: one ear off, one ear on. Cans are a pain – you wish you could live without them, but you can't quite."

> "USUALLY, WHEN I START, I WALK IN THE ROOM AND SAY 'ARE YOU GOING TO BE A FRIEND OR A FOE?'"

Richards is a master of recording guitars, and over the years has used compressed acoustics, Nashville and other tunings, and complex overdubs which always end up sounding simple. But those big guitar sounds almost invariably come from small amplifiers: "The stuff that sounds really big always comes out of a tiny amp! So the biggest amp I used on *Main Offender* was a Fender Twin, then down to Champs and Silvertones.

"Steve's one of these collectors; his apartment's a block away from where we were doing the overdubbing, so when we need an amp, we just go and raid the crypt, rummage around. We found this little Silvertone, this tiny little amp – and it sounds massive. We tended to do a lot of overdubs on different songs, so I can't say exactly what songs we used that one on, but on tape, it sounds fantastic. The thing with old amps, though – they're just like people! The older they get, the more opinionated they get about whether they're going to perform for you or not.

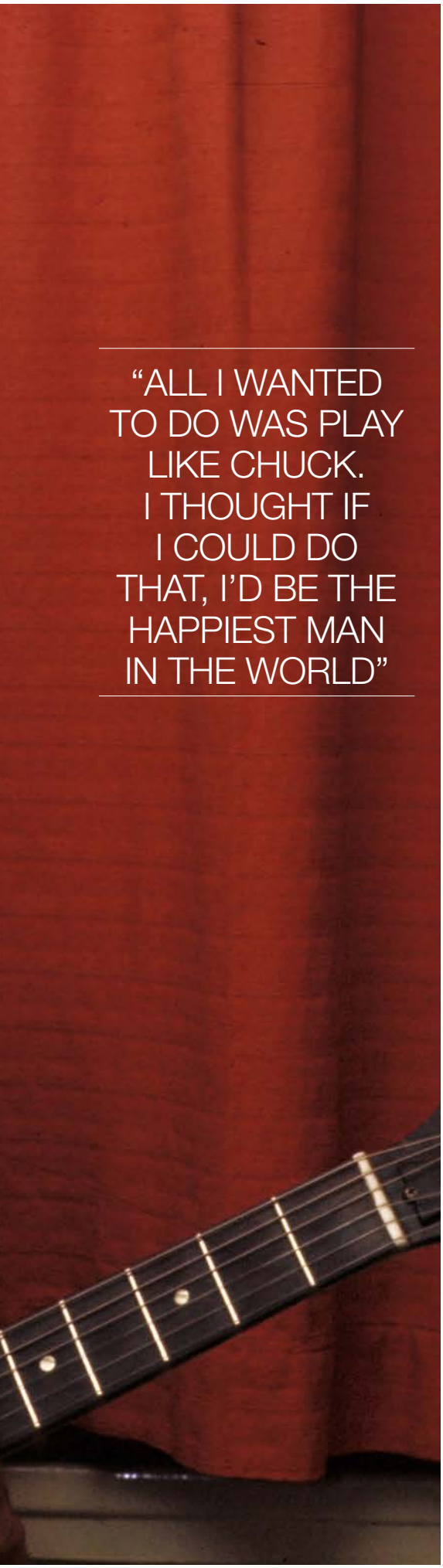
"I love those old amps more than my life, but they can be bitches. Try three or four Fender Champs and they're all different – one might have this extra zing on the high end, another's got this dirty graunch on the bottom. But that's the beauty of them, too."

THE BAND MASTER ON BANDMASTERS

"For this album, I also used a Fender Bandmaster, which is halfway between a Bassman and a guitar amp. And I use a Fender Bassman, which is almost impossible to record, but now and then, when you get it in the right spot, it's perfect."

When you build up a recorded track, do you start off with a picture of the finished result

Keith in a studio in 1966 with the 1962 Epiphone Casino ES-230TDV, with Tremotone unit, that he used in the mid 60s



"ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS PLAY LIKE CHUCK. I THOUGHT IF I COULD DO THAT, I'D BE THE HAPPIEST MAN IN THE WORLD"

Backstage during the Stones' Tour Of The Americas, 1975

in your head, or do you try parts out and see how they sound? "I don't have a final idea in my head of how it will sound. When we start recording the song, it's got the moves, the gut, the beat, all you can do is screw it up or make it better, so you start to put stuff on top. A lot of the time, you know what the first thing it needs is, you know you have to put one guitar on top, so one thing usually leads to another. Once the song's out of the cage, you grab its tail and say: 'Where you gonna take me?'

"I don't tend to think I've created a song, I prefer to think that they were there, I was around and I picked it up. From there, I could make it into something good. It's like being there and capturing it and hoping it will take me somewhere interesting."

THIEF IN THE NIGHT

Richards has compared his songwriting to being like a human radio, where he picks up songs out of the ether. Does he ever worry they might be someone else's? "Yeah. Especially the good ones. I think it's not mine. There was one Stones song, even after it was out, been a hit and had been around for years, I was convinced I'd stolen it. Nobody could tell me where it came from, but I was convinced it was a total steal – it was ages before I could put it out, I was so convinced it belonged to someone else."

Do you ever find yourself at a loss about what to write next, we ask? "Loads of times. Very rarely does a song come all at once. Half a song, snatches of an idea, but where does it go from here? You can reach an impasse. But writing with other people, more times than you think possible, he's got a piece of music he doesn't know what to do with, either.

"Mick and I have done that so many times we can't believe it. And a lot of the time, the songs will be in different keys, and I'm thinking, how the hell do we fit these together, I'm gonna have to change the key, and Mick might just say, 'Just play it' – you just stick them together – and it works!"

With Jagger and Richards established as rock music's most enduring songwriting team, it's easy to forget that it was manager Andrew Loog Oldham who forced the two into a room together and told them to write. "We just wanted to be a blues band – and in 1962, blues was not a way to stardom. It was aimed at giving people a kick in the teeth and waving our blues flags – then suddenly you're a pop star. When I started, all I wanted to do was play like Chuck [Berry]. I thought if I could do that, I'd be the happiest man in the world. Then, when I found out I could do it, I thought, well maybe there is another aim in life. But when I started I'd dream of playing with Muddy Waters, but the only way I'd imagine it happening would be 'if I make it to heaven – and he makes it there – then we can play together'."

It wasn't long after the release of the Stones' first album that Richards achieved his wish; the band went to Chess Studios in June 1964 in search of better recording quality than Britain's comparatively backward studios. "The weirdest thing was that when we met Muddy he was painting Chess studios. You walk in and start recording, on your hands and knees in this mecca, and they say you might like to meet this guy who's up on a stepladder in a white overall and you say: 'Who's that?' That's Muddy Waters.

"It was another of those slaps around the face. He wasn't selling records. And at the same time, he was a real gentleman. I would have expected a 'get out of here, white trash' reaction. But those guys were gentlemen, they saw wider than the music business. They immediately nurtured us, and had no reason to know that in a year or two they'd be selling more records than they ever had in their lives."

Although Keith's playing is perhaps closer to the spirit of Chuck Berry and Jimmy Reed

Keith playing his 1975 Tele Custom at the Oshawa Civic Auditorium in 1979

than any of his peers, the first few years of the Stones output saw him move light years beyond his roots. Early Jagger/Richards compositions like *19th Nervous Breakdown* saw him honing the art of the simple rock riff, an art which Richards raised to its apogee with *(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* – a song which, incidentally, provoked an early Jagger/Richards argument, Richards believing his own song was a one-riff gimmick; Jagger, band and Loog Oldham convinced it was a surefire winner. "Yeah, I thought it was a Mickey Mouse song. It was one of those songs that just comes in a dream, real easy, but I thought the fuzztone was just a gimmick."

No. 1 in Britain and the US, *...Satisfaction* set the seal on the writing partnership, and also confirmed the band's movement away from the leadership of Brian Jones. Keith has commented before how Jones lost interest in the guitar, experimenting instead with the likes of the harpsichord and dulcimer. Jones' loss of commitment – and later his death – left Richards with a void to fill that would inspire his greatest moments. A key point in this move was his discovery of open-G tuning.

"That all happened when the Stones had exhaustedly come to a halt in 1966 and I started listening to all my blues records again and reading the liner notes, and realised: 'Right, he's using a different tuning'. So in that period between '66 and *Beggars Banquet*, I started getting into blues tunings, Fred McDowell, 12-string and slide shit. But still in D and E."

> "WITH A SYNTHESISER, YOU CAN DO ANYTHING YOU LIKE. I DON'T WANT TO DO ANYTHING I LIKE!"

At the same time, Richards had made friends with Gram Parsons, who provided a complete education in country music: "Gram taught me the difference between Nashville and Bakersfield – I'd loved the sound of that music, but Gram took me right into the background of it." But although Parsons' country feel would influence tracks like *Country Honk* and *Love In Vain*, the one-time Byrd was "strictly a standard tuning guy".

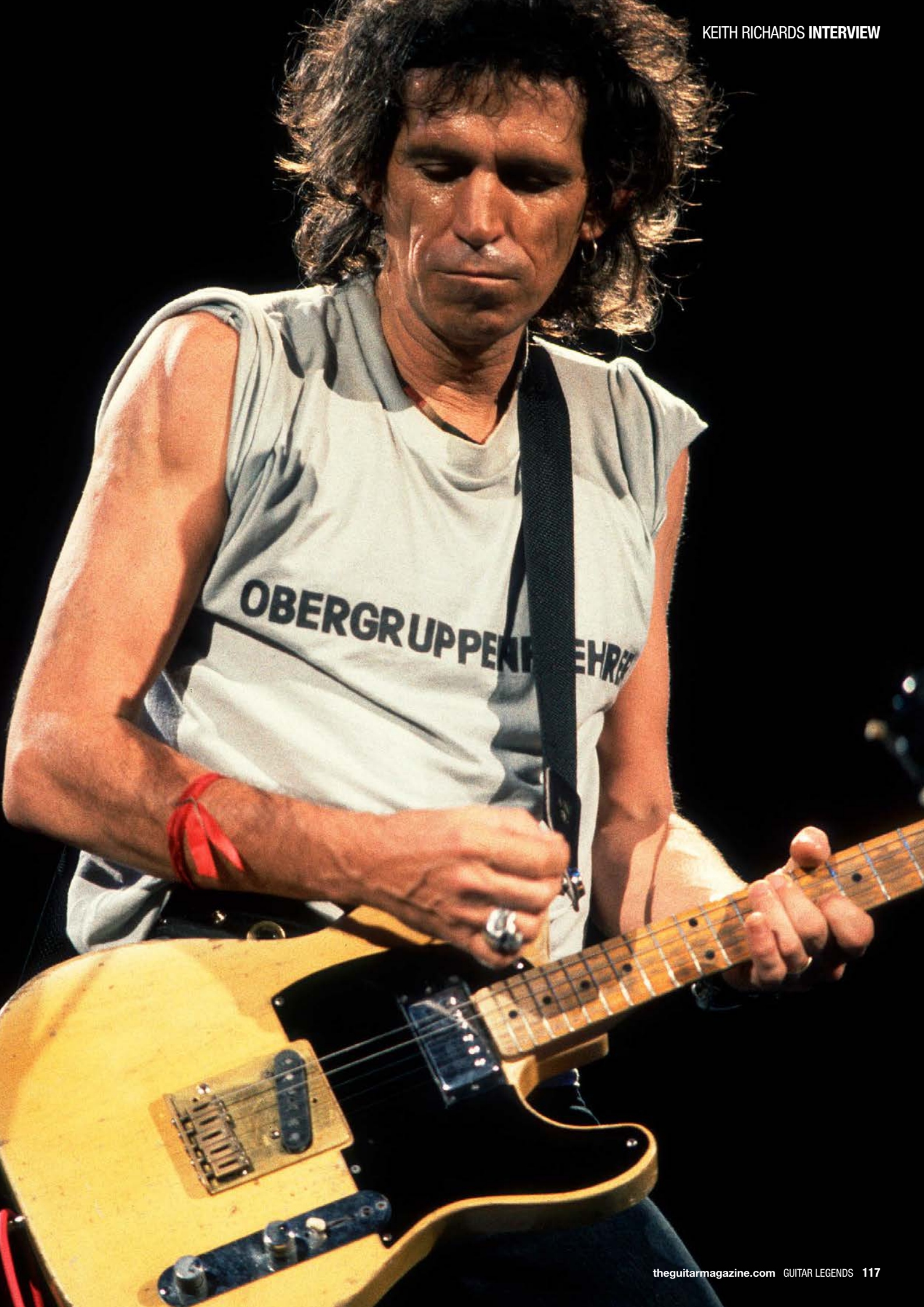
It was Ry Cooder, who came in for the *Sister Morphine* sessions, who showed Richards the tuning he would make his own. "I met Ry in 1968, when he was hanging around with Taj Mahal and Jesse Ed Davis. There were people like Clarence White around, too, some good guitar players! So we'd all pick stuff up from each other. Ry was using open G for slide, I saw him and thought, that's a really nice tuning. It restricts you so much; five strings, three notes, two fingers... one asshole!

HOT STREAK

"There's something about being restricted that opens up the possibilities. With a synthesiser, you can do anything you like. I don't want to do anything I like! I wanna do something that ties me down, where I can manoeuvre. So I started playing in G without the slide, and started to find other chords and realise this was a really good vehicle for me. Especially 'cause Brian had just... croaked, it was a period where there was no other guitar player and I was trying to figure out what the hell to do next. Then I started to work with Mick Taylor and we really hit our stride, *Beggars Banquet*, *Let It Bleed*, *Sticky Fingers*, then we had to move out; *Exile On Main St*. we worked together all in one joint."

Throughout the course of those albums, Richards would find his own vision, defining and refining the Stones' sound more and more. He was experimenting with Nashville tuning (in which the four 'bass' strings are tuned an octave higher – which, when doubled with a standard tuning, gives a 12-string effect), as well as using acoustics, preamped and compressed by a cheap tape recorder for rhythm parts on songs like *Street Fighting Man*. By the time of *Exile...*, the Stones were recording in the damp basement of Richards' house in the French Riviera, and the chaotic conditions produced what many regarded as the Stones' finest work.

"Especially making *Exile...*, I found this thing [the guitar] can do loads of things. It was there I really started appreciating the guitar.

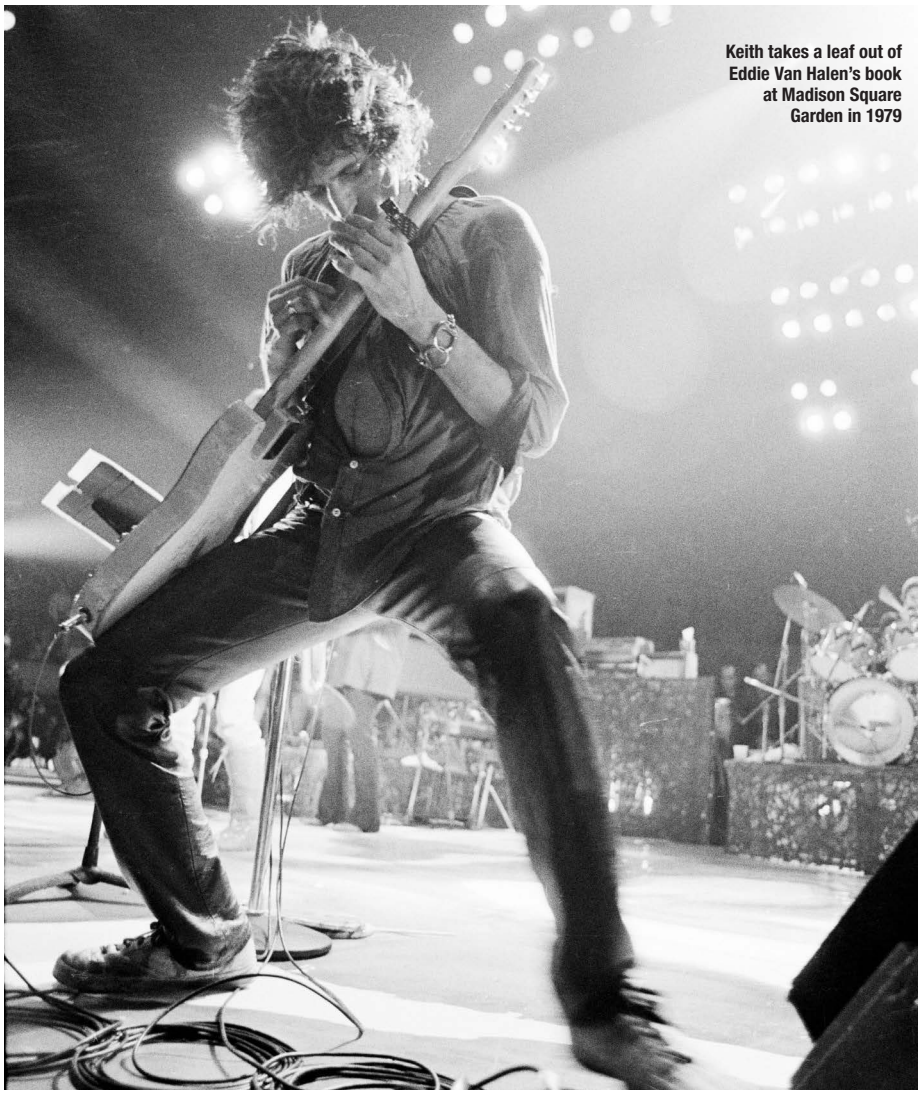

OBERGRUPPEN

I thought: it's got so many possibilities, and I'm just tinkering with it. And I still am. But it was there that I realised that this wasn't a tool that I could master, it was something that I could spend my whole life doing."

Richards has often commented that with Mick Taylor in the band "it became more like regular rhythm and lead guitar – it was much harder to get the Stones' sound". But there are many stories over how he was replaced. And was Ry Cooder, who helped Keith find his own sound, ever in the running for a place in the Stones?

"Ry? Musically, yes, I would have had him in the band. Personality-wise, no way. Ry wouldn't have fitted – and he was always his own man. I only found out lately that Eric wanted to jump in after Mick Taylor, but never did say so. But he expected us to call! It's like: 'Why didn't you call me?' – 'Because you're too damn good – and you're your own man!'. There's certain guys that are band players and there's certain guys that ain't. That's not a reflection on anybody. Eric's a great leader, but he's not a good bandleader. Eric's a chameleon – I love him dearly and he knows that... he's changed his hair again. And those suits! But if there's anybody lazier than me, it's Eric. He's got it all, but Eric's like Mick Taylor in a way, he needs to hire guys to play with him to kick him up the arse.

"The best playing I've heard from Eric in over 10 years was that thing with Chuck Berry, *Wee Wee Hours*, when he had a band kicking him up the arse, and he had to come through. And when he has to come through, Eric will come through like dynamite, but a lot of the time, he's cruising. You can be good, but you're not gonna be good with a bunch of Yes Men. They might be fantastic musicians, but he's avoiding guys who say 'Eric, you're wrong'. You need a team."



Keith takes a leaf out of Eddie Van Halen's book at Madison Square Garden in 1979

> "IT'S VERY HARD TO KEEP A TIGHT UNIT TOGETHER ONCE YOU'VE BEEN DISPLACED FROM YOUR OWN TURF"

PUTTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER

Richards' obsession with keeping his team together has also caused its frustrations. "The 70s were a hard time. Especially when they kicked us out of London, it's very hard to keep a tight unit together once you've been displaced from your own turf. So our main battle then was to keep the band together and write songs when you're several thousand miles apart, rather than 'I've written a song, I'll be round in five minutes'. But then you realise that this is all a challenge... Nobody's taken music this far – and it's a voyage of discovery.

"I'm looking forward more because now we've got over that stopping and starting thing. There's no way the Stones would have made *Steel Wheels*, starting it in February and ending it in June, if we hadn't done separate stuff. You would've spent two months getting the band into shape. For musicians, it's practice. You can't take two years off. So early in the New Year, Mick and I will get together and see what we've got. Bill's another subject, though."

Doubts about whether Wyman will return to the Stones camp after the current hiatus in the band's activity have been circulating for some time now. At one point, it was even rumoured Jagger's solo sidekick, Doug Wimbish, would be stepping in. Richards doesn't want to see any change.

"Bill, I've got to see eyeball to eyeball to get this thing sorted out once and for all. I don't want to say too much. My basic attitude is the Stones are getting together and I expect him to be there, I don't want to see this line-up change now. My basic attitude is the Stones are getting together and I expect him to be there, but at the same time I know I can't leave it that long. I don't wanna hear any more rumours and bullshit. It won't stop the Stones going on. I don't know what we'd do. Maybe he's happy running his restaurants... I don't know. Bill's a very noncommital guy, which is why I can't talk to him on the phone. Charlie says maybe we could threaten to replace him with a chick – maybe that will do the trick! It's a drag when your family squabbles are in the papers and everything you do is a potential headline. My view of life is totally distorted."

WILD HORSES

But whatever happens, Keith will find a way of keeping his band going. And whatever mistakes they might make along the way – well, that's all part of the grand design. "It could fall apart. It's a balancing act. But you can fall down and get up. I guess I got over my embarrassment over falling down in public a long time ago. That, to me, is what makes it interesting. You set yourself up for a fall, you don't wanna fall but you know you can get up.

"I really feel for new bands that are coming up because these days, you need a quarter of a million dollars before you can start. And with that big money, the marketing men want to play it safe. And when you play safe, the best you're gonna come up with is something that's not bad. And we're not here talking because music is not bad. We're here because it's fucking great! Playing safe is not what it's about. This music is all about beautiful fuck-ups. And beautiful recoveries."

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HUBERT SUMLIN

We caught up with the truly legendary Hubert Sumlin in 2002, to find Howlin' Wolf's sidekick with the stinging licks fit and firing, and back in action...

Words JULIAN PIPER

"Hubert is the heaviest, most original guitar player live that I've ever heard in my life – and that's the truth..." – so said no less an authority than Stevie Ray Vaughan. Though not quite in the Robert Johnson league, there can be few guitar players still living about whom quite so many myths have arisen as Sumlin.

Hubert allegedly lost his front teeth in an onstage altercation with the Wolf; another far-fetched anecdote has Hubert and his boss exchanging fire with handguns. Whatever the truth to these tales, Hubert Sumlin's recorded legacy with Howlin' Wolf stands as one of the most inspirational in the whole blues canon, with songs like *Little Red Rooster*, *Back Door Man*, *Smokestack Lightnin'* and *Killing Floor* becoming staples in the repertoires of acts as diverse as the Grateful Dead and The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

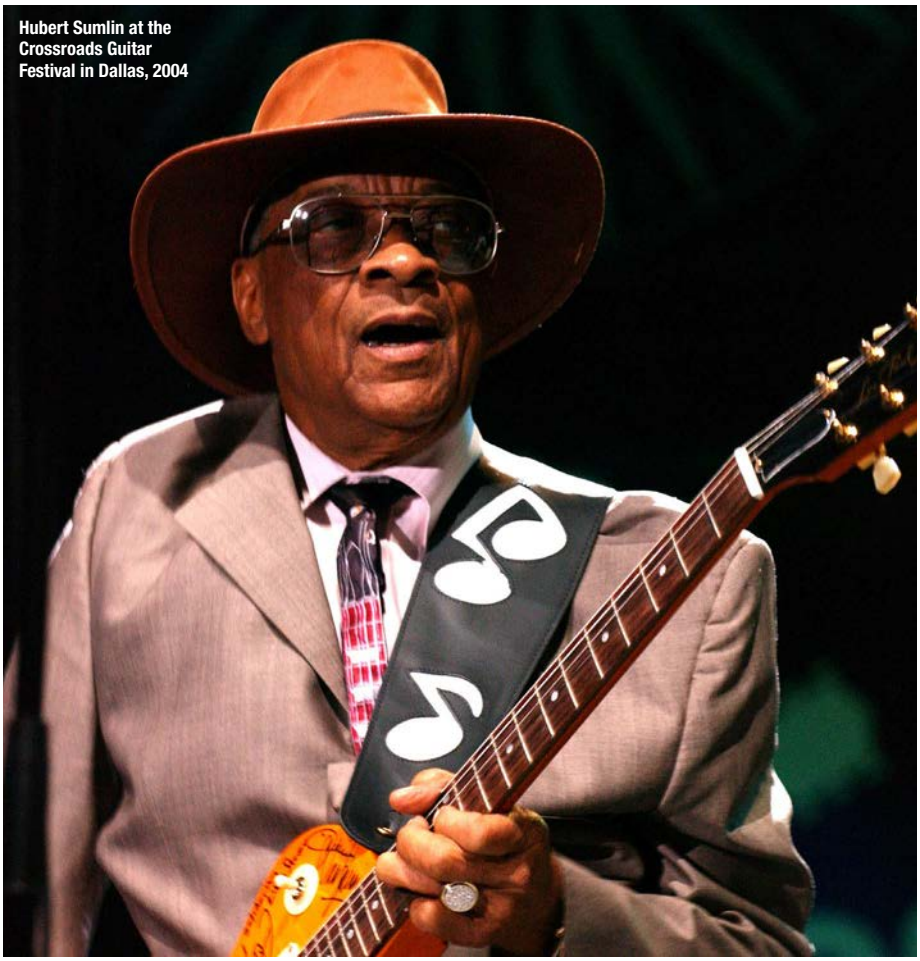
Hubert Sumlin's intense guitar sound was quite unlike anyone else's out there and, although his spiky runs always harked back to his Mississippi Delta roots, tracks like *Killing Floor* and *Going Down Slow* eerily predated the heavier cover versions by Cream and Led Zeppelin that would appear a decade later.

Now a spry 70-year-old, Sumlin still exudes an excited enthusiasm for his music and guitar playing, and begins by happily recalling his first visit to England.

"We came over for two weeks in 1964 to tour with the Chris Barber Jazz Band," he reminisces. "The lineup with a trombone was a lot different from the Chicago bands I'd always played with, but we really appreciated the chance to come over and play, and the work Chris had done for us. We played clubs like the Marquee in Wardour Street and toured all over; we were on the BBC – a radio show called *Saturday Club*."

Old photographs taken at the time show Sumlin playing an unusual white Stratocaster-type guitar that had more knobs than the Starship Enterprise. "Man, that guitar was terrible," Sumlin laughs. "I came over without a guitar, thinking that they'd be as cheap as in the States, but I was wrong! It was some kind of Höfner that I bought over in Germany. I liked it because it looked pretty, but it wouldn't stay in tune. As soon as I got home, I gave it away to my brother."

Though the years have seen him using a multitude of guitars – witness the Gretsch and his iconic Goldtop Les Paul – Hubert is



Hubert Sumlin at the Crossroads Guitar Festival in Dallas, 2004

currently playing a stock Fender Tele and a '52 Tele reissue, through a Peavey Classic 50.

BACK-DOOR BOY

The youngest of 13 children, Sumlin was born on 16 November 1931 in Greenwood, Mississippi, growing up in nearby Hughes, Arkansas. His first gig was as fill-in guitarist with harp player James Cotton, but it was his time with Chester Burnett, aka Howlin' Wolf, that would score a place in blues history. Their first meeting was as legendary as the music they made together. As an 11-year-old, Sumlin had crawled into a local juke joint, hoping to sneak in and hear the band.

After being kicked out as soon as he was spotted, he went to the back of the club where he stacked Coca-Cola cases against a window. As he stood on the top to look in, the cases collapsed, sending the luckless lad crashing through the window.

"I LOOKED UP AND SAW THIS HUGE MAN THAT WAS THE WOLF. I WAS SCARED AS HELL, BUT HE JUST SAID 'LET HIM STAY'"

"I looked up and saw this huge man that was the Wolf lookin' right down at me. I was scared as hell, but he just said 'Let him stay... let him stay, bring him a chair'." And I ended up staying all night watching Wolf, Pat Hare and Junior Parker play. The Wolf took me home that night and begged my mother not to whup me, because all I wanted to do was just hear the music. But I always knew that I was going to play with that guy," says Sumlin.

It was the beginning of a friendship that would last for more than three decades. The bond was so strong that, after the Wolf's death in 1976, Sumlin hung his guitar up for many years, unable to face performing without his old partner.

It had been a long road. Sumlin had originally moved to Chicago in 1954, where he immediately became a staple member of the Wolf's band. However, the rivalry for gigs was intense and never more so than that between the Wolf and Muddy Waters.

"Those two guys always thought that they could beat one another and I actually quit Wolf for a while to play with Muddy – you know how it is with kids," he jokes. "Muddy was of fering me three times the money, but what I didn't realise was that his band was touring, sometimes 1,000 miles between shows. We did so much driving that I got the haemorrhoids so bad I couldn't sit down – they bought me feather pillows to sit on!

"Man, soon as I got back to Chicago I was straight on the phone to the Wolf, sayin' I wanted to come back. Muddy started crying

Sumlin in New York City in 1987, the same year he released his first solo album, *Hubert Sumlin's Blues Party*, at the age of 56

and carrying on, but Wolf just said: 'Don't start that junk with me...' and that was the end of it."

LONDON SESSIONS

Sumlin's new album, *Hubert Plays Muddy*, is a tribute to Muddy Waters, featuring an all-star band including contributions by Keith Richards and Eric Clapton, both of whom first met up with the guitarist in 1971 for the controversial and star-studded album, *The London Howlin' Wolf Sessions*.

The American blues mafia, incensed that American blues legends like BB King and Muddy Waters were being brought to London to record, churlishly refused to believe that there were any British musicians who were capable of performing alongside a bluesman of the Wolf's stature. It's not a view that's shared by Sumlin.

"ERIC SAID TO THE RECORD COMPANY THAT IF I WASN'T GOING TO BE THERE, THEN HE WASN'T GOING TO BE THERE"

"It was wonderful to play with those guys again, particularly Eric," he says warmly. "Without him, I would never have been on the original London Sessions. The Chess brothers and the record company really didn't want me to play, because they said that they'd sell more records on the back of The Rolling Stones being involved. But Eric turned right around and said to the record company that if I wasn't going to be there, then he wasn't going to be there either. Next thing I knew, they're saying: 'Pack your bags', and I was gone!

"But those guys have never forgotten. They helped us then and they're helping me now. Before we did the recording, I went around to Keith's house and he showed me some shit which I liked so I said: 'Put that on my recording!'. But I showed him some blues, too," Hubert laughs.

The Wolf's back catalogue is vast; but when asked to name one track that's special for him, Hubert is unequivocal. "*Going Down Slow* is the one. St. Louis Jimmy, the man who wrote that song, was just sitting in the studio looking at us and the soul just came out. He asked Wolf if he would record it and that was the deal – that Jimmy would be there watching.

"Every time that we got ready to record, the Wolf and I would sit down on our own before the band came in and work out what we were going to do. We'd think of a hundred ways to cut a song, but as long as we had the feeling in out hearts, that was the one we would use. That old man would say: 'Hubert – I think we're gonna make it', and we would."

JOHNNY WINTER

After a career spanning more than 40 years, Johnny Winter's blues dues are now well and truly paid. In this July 2008 interview, the man with the Gibson Firebird tells us about his early days, fateful band break-ups, and the trouble with guitar strings...

Words ALEX THOMAS

Texas has produced more than its fair share of superlative blues players, from T-Bone Walker and Lightnin' Hopkins to Albert Collins and Stevie Ray Vaughan. To that stellar list we must of course add Johnny Winter, the wiry, fiery Texan with the hypercharged slide-guitar sound. What exactly is it about Texas? Even Winter doesn't know. "I guess maybe it's something in the water," he grins.

Johnny Winter was born on 23 February 1944 in the bustling oil port of Beaumont, Texas, not far from the Louisiana border, and grew up surrounded by blues, country and Cajun music. He first played the ukulele in a duo with his younger brother Edgar, but by 14, he'd become a local teenage sensation, playing a Black Les Paul and fronting his own band Johnny And The Jammers, with young Edgar on keyboards. He had already begun recording and was hanging out on the wrong side of the tracks in Beaumont's black blues clubs.

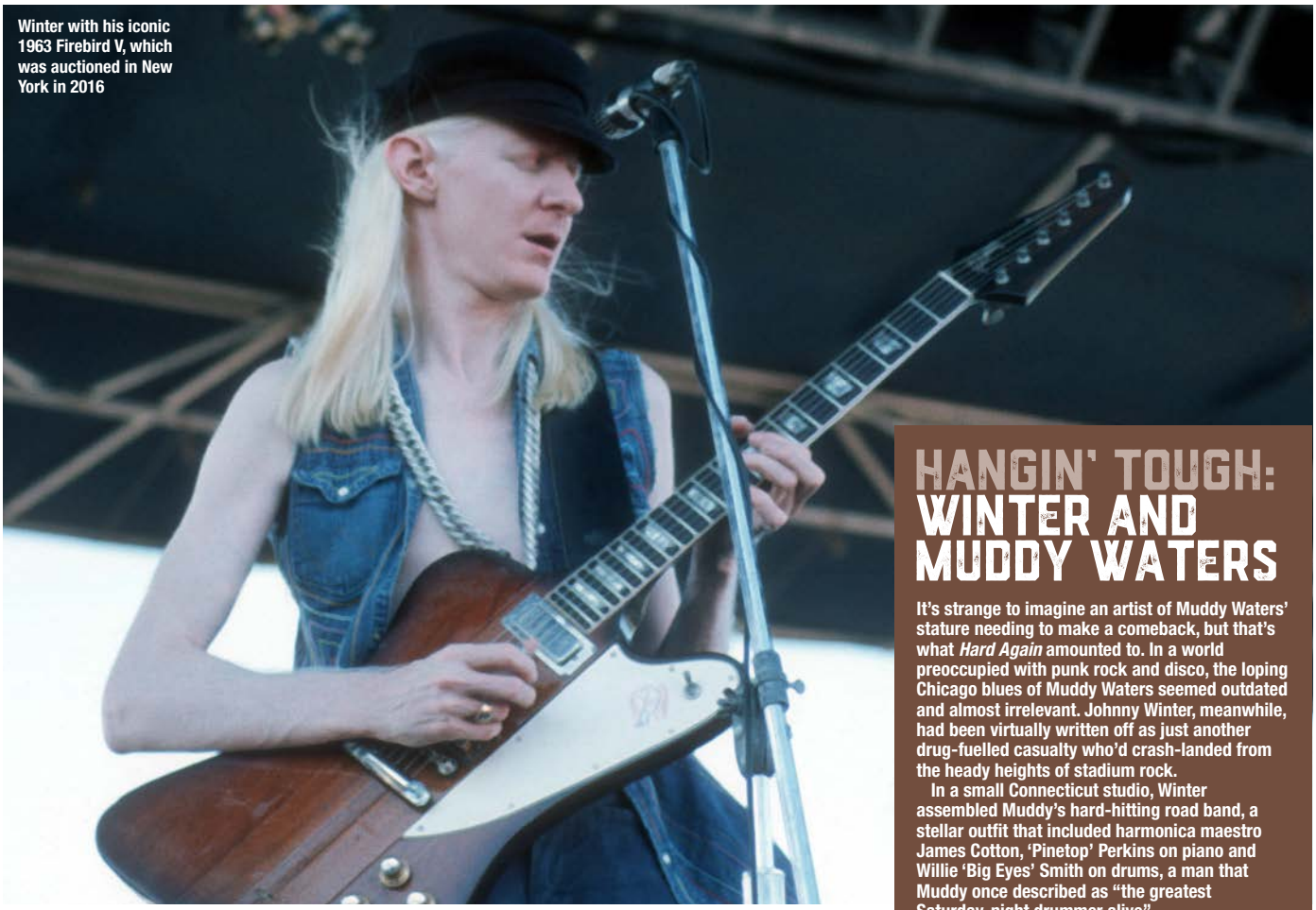
"I loved everything about the blues – the feel, the soul, and the sound," Winter tells us. "I was able to hear it on the radio all the time from stations like WLAC in Nashville, our local Shreveport station, and even one based in Del Rio, Mexico. I listened to just about all the blues I could get!"

In the rigidly segregated Southern States, surely it must have been quite unusual for a white kid to be seen hanging out in blues clubs – let alone an albino with blinding white hair.

"It was never a problem for me, and that's how I first met BB King; he was playing an all-black club and I walked in and bugged him to let me play," Winter recalls. "I was only about 17 years old and BB didn't want to let me on stage at first, even asking me for a union card. There were quite a few friends there that wanted to see me play, so finally, he thought he might as well let me up. I didn't have a guitar with me, so BB gave me his to use – and I got a standing ovation! I think he was surprised."

STRING THEORY

Apart from his slide playing, Johnny Winter's style is characterised by blistering runs and demonic string bending – but, as he admits, it wasn't an easy learning curve. "When I started to play the only strings that you could buy were these Gibson Sonomatics which came with a wound G string. I was listening to all these Chuck Berry and T-Bone Walker records and just couldn't figure out how they managed to bend the strings the way they did – it was impossible. Luckily, I also knew Clarence Garlow who was a popular local blues singer and a DJ on KJET, one of the stations I listened to all the time. Clarence turned me



Winter with his iconic 1963 Firebird V, which was auctioned in New York in 2016

onto using an unwound G string, which was a revelation."

In 1967, Johnny Winter walked into the small downtown Austin nightclub with his rhythm section – bassist Tommy Shannon (later of Double Trouble) and Uncle John Turner on drums – and recorded the album The Progressive Blues Experiment. Although Winter is dismissive of it today, 40 years on, this mix of raw blues standards and Winter originals in the mix still sounds raw, vital and exciting. "I never thought of it that way," Winter says. "I just looked at it as a good blues record. That whole thing was just done on a small recorder."

After a writer for *Rolling Stone* magazine dubbed Johnny Winter the "hottest item outside of Janis Joplin", demos of the guitarist's album inspired a frenzied bidding war amongst New York's A&R men. Finally signed by Columbia Records after his dynamic appearance at Woodstock, Winter ditched his rhythm section and teamed up with Rick Derringer And The McCoys to take his incendiary blues-drenched rock out into the stadium circuit. Soon, Winter's long flowing white hair and Gibson Firebird became a major attraction on the 70s US stadium-rock circuit – but, as, he candidly admits, breaking up his Texas trio had been a difficult decision to make. "I hated having to part with Tommy and Uncle John – it was my manager Steve Paul's idea. But although the blues was big in the late 60s, it had kind of worn itself out and people just weren't digging it as much. Everybody was telling me that I had to do something different, and I kind of agreed that I did need to vary it a little bit. I still love some rock 'n' roll, too, and it was fun doing it... but I always missed playing the straight blues."

> "I STILL LOVE SOME ROCK 'N' ROLL, TOO, AND IT WAS FUN. BUT I ALWAYS MISSED PLAYING STRAIGHT BLUES"

HARD AGAIN

Winter's renaissance a few years later could not have been more appropriate. Teaming up with his longtime hero Muddy Waters – the pair had first played together in the Austin clubs – Winter produced 1977's *Hard Again*, an album that not only kickstarted Muddy Waters own career but also firmly re-established the name of Johnny Winter in the blues pantheon. Since then, despite the occasional health problem, his career has continued unabated, and as he proved last year with his appearance on Eric Clapton's Chicago Crossroads Guitar Festival show playing *Highway 61 Revisited*, the Texas tornado had lost none of his fire.

At 63 years of age, Johnny Winter now presents a worryingly frail figure, but clearly enjoys playing and is currently romping through a ferocious gig schedule that takes in Europe and North America. These days, Winter sits down onstage to play, and the trappings of his stadium-rock days – rock 'n' roll and bad whiskey – are long gone.

But when he straps on his Firebird and launches into *Mojo Boogie* or *Hideaway*, in the words of his album title, it's always the real deal – nuthin' but the blues.

HANGIN' TOUGH: WINTER AND MUDDY WATERS

It's strange to imagine an artist of Muddy Waters' stature needing to make a comeback, but that's what *Hard Again* amounted to. In a world preoccupied with punk rock and disco, the loping Chicago blues of Muddy Waters seemed outdated and almost irrelevant. Johnny Winter, meanwhile, had been virtually written off as just another drug-fuelled casualty who'd crash-landed from the heady heights of stadium rock.

In a small Connecticut studio, Winter assembled Muddy's hard-hitting road band, a stellar outfit that included harmonica maestro James Cotton, 'Pinetop' Perkins on piano and Willie 'Big Eyes' Smith on drums, a man that Muddy once described as "the greatest Saturday-night drummer alive".

With Winter at the helm, the band stormed through old Muddy favourites *Mannish Boy*, *I Can't Be Satisfied* and *Walking Through The Park*, recreating Muddy Waters' bar-honed live sound. Winter opted for a simple recording approach and the whole thing was wrapped up in two days – a method that paid dividends in recreating the propulsive vibe of singles released on the original Chess label. To everyone's surprise, Muddy showed no interest in playing his beaten-up red Telecaster, allowing Winter to play all the slide roles with Bob Margolin holding down the rhythm.

As things turned out, the album was a timely opportunity for both musicians to rejuvenate their stagnant careers. Muddy Waters went on to tour with Eric Clapton – and marry a girl young enough to be his daughter – and Winter enjoyed a complete renaissance, as a bluesman second-to-none.

Did Waters appreciate Winter's hard work? It seems he did. Asked once about the origin of the album's title, Waters reported that the music was so good: "It made my little pee-pee hard again."

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